CATCHING AN ELEPHANT

by Tambimuttu

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Charlie Lewis was ten years old, and he was excited as the plane flew away from New York. He looked at the animal pictures in the book Uncle Jack had sent him. He had not seen him for three years. The one man of mystery in Charlie's life was Uncle Jack, who was a famous writer. He lived in far-away Ceylon, the beautiful island in the Indian Ocean, which is full of spices, jungles, animals and palm trees.

He had received the most curious and wonderful presents from Uncle Jack. There were books written on palm leaves with lovely paintings in them. There were boxes made of the black and white quills of the porcupine, the strange animal which lives in America and Ceylon. The animal shot the arrow-sharp quills off its back when it was attacked.

Charlie sat down more comfortably to read about the porcupine, and then he turned to the chapter on elephants. There were many pictures of elephants at work.

One planted concrete telegraph-poles in the holes workmen had dug. Another plucked up old and useless tea-bushes, roots and all, and arranged them in neat heaps. The funniest picture showed an elephant hauling a heavy roller uphill. It was building a road, rolling down the gravel hard where no steam-roller in Ceylon could have done the job.

"I wonder how they catch elephants," Charlie wondered, running through the pages of his book. But there was not one picture of an elephant capture, nor mention of how this was done, as far as he could see.

In the morning the huge overseas plane roared down to a stop in Colombo.

How tall Uncle Jack seemed! And handsome! He was sunburned a nut-brown and wore a topee. No wonder. How hot Ceylon is, thought Charlie, as he mopped up the perspiration with a sheet of Kleenex.

He felt like laughing out loud at Haneef, Uncle Jack's chauffeur, who wore a red fez with a black tassel in the center. Haneef was small, shy, highly nervous and had a nervous tic on one side of his face. Whenever he turned his closely-shaved head, the tassel of his fez wriggled like a fisherman's can of worms.

Then he saw two elephants, with gentle eyes, coming out of the stone gate which fronted the garden of a great house. They were dressed in scarlet and gold. One was black and had tusks five feet long. The other had smaller tusks, or tushes, and was grey. He had never seen such big elephants. Two mahouts, or elephant-guides, in scarlet turbans rode them, holding sticks tipped with iron.

"Yeiks, what elephants," he cried.

"Aren't they?" said Uncle Jack. "They belong to my friend Skanda, the Catcher of Elephants, and they are very special."

"Catcher of Elephants?" said Charlie.

"The tusker is called Kalua or the Black One, and the other one is Haami. They are Skanda's favorite elephants."

"Your friend's elephants! Tell me Uncle Jack," he asked excitely, "how does he catch them?"

"Wait till you meet Skanda, and you'll find out," chuckled Uncle Jack. "Skanda's the only man allowed by the Government to catch them. His family's been allowed to catch elephants for a thousand years. A sort of gift to a good worker from a king of Ceylon."

That night Charlie read his book, but it did not say how elephants were caught. However, he learned something that astonished him. When elephants are going to die, they travel to a secret place in the jungle. And only the elephants, with their wise and gentle eyes, know where this graveyard is.

If any man found it he would be rich beyond belief, because of all the ivory he would find. But no man has discovered an elephant graveyard. More strange, no man has ever found the body of a dead elephant in the jungle.

"What on earth happens to them,then?" said Charlie out loud.

Then he put out the light. He had decided that was one of the questions he would ask Skanda when they met.

CHAPTER 2

They called on him next day. The great stone gate which led to his house, through which the elephants Kalua and Haami had come out the previous day, was carved with the most beautiful animal and human figures Charlie had ever seen.

"The gate is copied from a city which is ~~xxxx~~ in the deepest heart of the jungle, and is 2,600 years old," his uncle said. "It is now in ruins. It was once as large as New York City."

Charlie could not take his eyes off Skanda. He was as tall as Uncle Jack and gazed at you like a stern, yet not unkindly, hawk. The lines of his face were fine. He had blue-black hair, heavily-lidded eyes with long lashes, and an almond ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ complexion. When he smiled, he showed his white, white teeth and his face glowed like a Chinese paper lantern.

Skanda walked up and down the verandah as he talked. The floor was a bright orange and polished smooth as glass. There were comfortable chairs, with cushions, which were strongly woven out of tanned cane. By the soaring pillars stood copper-bound tubs and brass urns filled with plants he had never seen before. He wished his mother could see them. She loved gardening and had trees and flowers growing on the roof of her apartment in New York. Since the verandah had no walls, he could see the garden through the great pillars.It was full of flowers which, he was sure, even his mother had never seen.

The electric fans on the ceiling of the verandah whirled away lazily.

The servants, who wore white suits and scarlet turbans, brought in some

whiskey and soda. Charlie was thinking of a coca-cola. But instead, they brought him a pot of tea and many kinds of cakes and sandwiches. He noticed the asparagus sandwiches first, which were rolled into thin fingers, because he was fond of asparagus.

"The last days of the kraal are her, Jack," said Skanda. "My two decoys left for the jungles of Pana yesterday.

"We saw them, Mr Skanda!" Charlie exclaimed. "They are called Kalua the Black One and Haami. What are decoys?"

"They are the tame ones we use to catch the wild ones, Charlie. Kalua has been King of the Kraal for thirty-five years. Haami helps Kalua in everything he does at the kraal. She's clever."

"What's kraal, Mr Skanda?"

"Kraal?.... It's like the corrall of the American cowboys, I suppose. It's the word for rounding up a herd of elephants."

"When the trackers find a herd, two or three thousand beaters form a square round it. They beat drums, shout, and fire blank cartridges to keep it within the square. When they rest, they light huge bonfires around. Elephants won't willingly pass them. So they stay together in the centre of the square, angry and restless."

"But we also have an actual corrall built of stout tree-trunks. Three thousand beaters, at Pana, have been driving two herds towards it for the past two months."

"All that time?" exclaimed Charlie.

"At the final found-up, the beaters will drive the elephants into the corral with flaming torches and a lot of drumming. They will light bonfires, shoot off blank cartridges, and shout dah!dah! which is the sound elephants dislike most. Kraal is the word for the whole operation. We have an elephant kraal once every four or five years."

"Can't the elephants charge through the corrall?"

"Certainly they can. And they have, killing many beaters. That is why we have bonfires inside it to scare them, and the decoys to wrestle with the more dangerous elephants. There are also the beaters with their long spears.

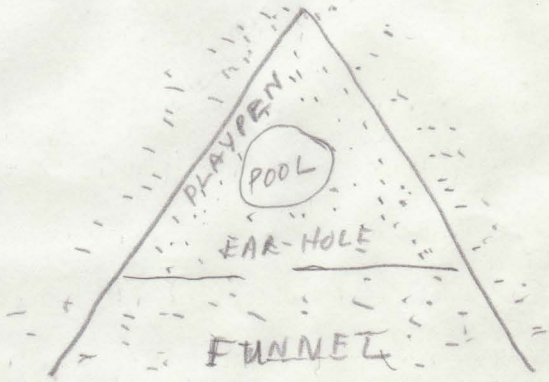
"Have you a gate to the corrall?"

"Yes, Charlie. We call it the kan-gula or ear-hole," said Skanda, grinning.

"The corrall itself, which contains several acres of jungle trees and water, is called the kalina-gala, or play-pen."

"It is built in the shape of a triangle. Two sides of the triangle stretch out into the jungle for several hundred yards, making a funnel to the corrall. The beaters drive the elephants into this funnel. And then through the ear-hole into the play-pen. Here, let me draw you a picture of a corrall!"

The Catcher of Elephants drew out a notebook from his pocket and drew this picture for him:



"It's important to build the corrall round a pool of water," the Catcher of Elephants continued. "You see, the elephants have been kept thirsty for weeks. If there were streams along the path of the drive-in, the beaters cleverly diverted them so their beds were dry. It's the smell of water within the corrall that crowds the elephants into the funnel, as well as the beating of the beaters."

"When the beaters have driven a herd through the ear-hole into the play-pen, a curtain of logs is quickly rolled over the ear-hole. The animals are then trapped, good and proper, in the play-pen."

"But how do you actually catch them?"

"Oh Charlie, aren't you inquisitive!" laughed Skanda. He showed his white

and lonely journey to a secret graveyard. And only the elephants know where the secret graveyard is."

"Is that so?" said Skanda, sitting down and smiling at Charlie.

"Yes. Because of the ivory, many men have searched for elephant graveyards. It's just like searching for pirate's gold. But no man has ever discovered an elephant graveyard. And more strange, no man has ever found the body of a dead elephant in the jungle. What happens to elephants when they die?"

"What happens to elephants when they die?" repeated Skanda, looking at him gravely. "I tell you what, Charlie, I promise I'll show you what happens to elephants when they die before you leave Ceylon."

"Really?"

"That's a promise," said Skanda. looking at Uncle Jack mysteriously.

"When will the final drive-in start?" Uncle Jack asked.

Skanda got up from his chair and started to pace the orange verandah again. He paused to take another sip of whiskey from the tray.

"One of the herds we are trapping has Banda for their leader," he said with increasing excitement. "As you know Jack, he is the fiercest and noblest elephant I have set my eyes on. He crashed through the walls of the stockade at the kraal five years ago, scattering it like matchsticks. He set the whole herd free. Many beaters were trampled to death.

"I remember that," said Uncle Jack.

"He is beautiful, and powerfully built," Skanda went on as if in a trance. "A foot taller than any elephant ever seen in Ceylon. His well-shaped head is noble, and he has eyes the color of honey. His round fore-feet have five beautiful nails and his oval hind-feet four. He is a mountain of beauty and strength never before seen in our country."

"It's quite a chance you take!" said Uncle Jack, looking at his friend with affection.

"Isn't it?" said Skanda. And he stood still.

girlish and graceful with their slender trunks, and swaying, feathery heads.

Then the landscape changed. There were tall silvery rubber trees everywhere. Women in rainbow-colored saris were cutting large V-shapes on their bark.

The cuts made the trees bleed with a white sap which flowed down the cuts into tin cups the women attached to the bottoms of the V's.

"Do you see how they make rubber, Charlie?" said Uncle Jack. "The white sap is called latex. It is processed into sheet rubber in the factory you see on top of that hill. It's called rubber crepe. America and Europe buy it for manufacturing automobile tires and other rubber goods."

The landscape changed again, almost within minutes! They were motoring through billowing hill country covered with green tea-bushes. Beautifully painted tea-factories stood in the fresh and cool air of the hills, surrounded with dew-heavy gardens. Countless streams dashed past, and a hundred waterfalls bright as Ceylon mornings, fell among forests of tree-ferns and clouds of many-colored butterflies. Rambling roses fell down the rocks and cottages like streams of water.

"Now you can guess," said Uncle Jack, "why Ceylon is called the Pearl on the Brow of India. The Christians, Mohammedans and Jews believe Adam came to Ceylon when he was banished from the Garden of Eden. It was his second Eden where he stood on one foot, in penance, on a mountain peak. He stood for so long, he left his foot-print on a rock there. That's why the second highest peak in Ceylon is called Adam's Peak."

The hills were red, orange, blue, pearl-grey - all imaginable colors. Slim-bodied, graceful women in their saris, which is the national dress, were plucking the young and tender leaves from the tea-bushes. With a quick flick of the wrist, they threw the leaves into cane baskets hanging on their backs attached to the shoulders.

"They take the leaves to the factories where the workers are paid by the weight of their day's plucking," said Uncle Jack. "There they are rolled

or bruised between rollers, in machines, and allowed to ferment to develop a strong flavor. This is a delicate process carried out in rooms surrounded by falling water to keep the air damp. Next they are dried/ or withered, as they say, and packed in chests to be sold at the public auctions in Colombo and London."

"The women only pluck two leaves and a bud," Skanda added. "They taste much the best!"

"What a lot of hard work!" Charlie could not help saying.

Haneef, the chauffeur with the red fez, accelerated the car as they entered jungle country, on their way to the more wild and dangerous jungles of Pana. The car hummed like a plane and literally flew over the smooth grey macadam of the road.

And they were immediately beseiged by an army of monkeys. There were big black-faced monkeyes, and small grey-faced monkeys. They swung about among the branches, chattering excitedly, and one ran across the road with a mocking face, his tail sticking up in the air.

Haneef stepped wildly on the brakes. The tassel of his fez shot up in the air like a frightened crow. With a crashing of jungle branches, the immense grey figure of a wild elephant appeared on the road, curving its long thick trunk to one side. Charlie froze in his seat. But the great beast paid little attention to them. It crossed the road, slowly and deliberately, with th light tread of a ballerina. And it disappeared into the jungle with more tearing and crashing of branches.

Brightly colored jungle-fowl and pea-fowl fluttered by. The spotted deer grazed in jungle thickets. Their young, which seemed to belong to a fairy story, were so very small and delicately built. They were will used to the motor traffic.

They stopped for a late lunch at one of the rest-houses in the jungle which had been

also helped himself to a couple of crimson and orange mangoes with a happy expression on his face.

The servants brought in silver bowls of rose-water to wash the tips of the fingers. The smell of roses and the curries, which still lingered in the dining room, made Charlie feel he was in a very, very strange country.

And the punkah swayed lazily swayed overhead like a sleepy blue parakeet on its perch, airing the room. And the brown tassels swam lazily along with it.

As they left the dining room. Charlie noticed the little boy in his sky-blue turban fast asleep on the mat in the garden.

He still had the noose of the rope on his toe, and still he pulled xxx rhythmically away at it, though he was as fast asleep as a dormouse.

CHAPTER 4

Haneef, who wore the red fez, halted the car in a jungle clearing. There was a small encampment of men who crowded round them when they arrived. They transferred to a ~~xxxxxxxx~~ jeep while he parked the car in the clearing, and their luggage was transferred from the one to the other.

And they were on their way again. The jungle trail was rutted with the wheels of bullock-carts and trucks. Roots of trees darted across the trail pitted with iron-bound wheels and treaded tires, where they had got stuck and eaten away at it. Granite boulders hit the jeep which bucked like a wild bronco at a rodeo. The tassel of the red fez went crazy, and Charlie wondered how Haneef managed to keep it on at all.

Nevertheless the jungle scene was peaceful. Charlie could feel the stillness of the jungle tide and its wild growth which existed for itself alone. Great creepers, with enormous gold and yellow leaves, crept silently up the tree trunks. Others,with deep green leaves, fell down as solemnly to the matted leaves which covered the jungle's floor. Orchids, of many colors and shapes, grew high above the ground in the forks of tree-branches.

was a platform of logs built high on a tree overlooking the corrall.

Skanda, Uncle Jack and Charlie climbed up the ladder of bamboo lashed with jungle vines. It was exciting to stand so high up and look into the jungle's heart.

"Now you can see right down into the corrall," said the Catcher of Elephants. "You can see the play-pen is built in the shape of a triangle, and two sides of it stretch out to form the funnel."

Actually Charlie could not see. All he saw was jungle and a sheet of water below him.

"The beaters have camouflaged the corrall with tree branches," Skanda went on. "So it may be difficult for you to see at first. Look at the pool of water in the center, and then see if you can follow the walls of the play-pen round it."

There were thick jungle trees both inside and outside the play-pen. Charlie looked at the pool and thought he saw the triangle of the play-pen and the funnel that stretched out from it. Soon the bonfires of the beaters and the formation of their attack would make things clearer to him.

"At least you can see the ear-hole in the center of the play-pen," said Skanda, pointing to a break in the curtain of trees.

Charlie thought he saw it.

"You may also see the curtain of logs, raised like the portcullis of a castle, over it. The beaters will roll it down over the ear-hole as soon as a herd has entered the play-pen.

They stood on the messa in silence, under the star-lit sky, and the jungle magic crept in with the darkness. Charlie could hear stirrings in the jungle, of leaves, of insects and of animals and birds, perhaps. He could hear gun-shots in the distance. The sky about a half mile away, which had been bright, reddened.

preferred a Ceylonese breakfast.

Charlie saw that a Ceylonese breakfast was even more complicated than lunch at the jungle rest-house. There were so many strange dishes with tempting colors - orange, red, green, yellow, purple -and they had the exotic aromas of the spice island itself.

The guests selected what they preferred from the waiters' tureens and ate them with string-hoppers, instead of rice. The string-hoppers were tea-saucer sized, and were a solid mass of steamed strings of fine flour, thinner than vermicilli. Each person ate a dozen to twenty, or so, of them. What appetites!

Charlie could not resist trying some with beef curry, a Western-style omlette,and some freshly-made chutneys, each of which had a strangely different flavor. There was coconut in one,and tiny shrimp in another. The delicate, lace-like string-hoppers melted like snow in his mouth. What an extraordinary breakfast!

But Charlie had been up very early that morning. The beaters' gun-shots and yells, which were almost at the very edge of kraal-town now, had woken him up.

After he had washed in a basin of water that a man set up on a stand for him, he had some coffee. Charlie thought it was the best cup of cofee he had ever had. It had a fresh, thrilling taste which he had never before tasted in coffee. He was to remember that cup of coffee for many a day. Had he only known, this was entirely due to the wildness of the jungle, the jungle air, and the warm human feeling of hot coffee on a chilly morning.

Then the sun had risen in a blaze of orange, red, yellow, pearl-grey and every color imaginable. Charlie felt the world of color was being born for the first time.

The morning songs of birds were piercing and beautiful. They were clear

and flute-like, and mixed into a jungle chorus of ~~unearthly~~ unearthly beauty. He thought of some of the Ceylon birds Uncle Jack had told him about - Golden Oriole, Tailor-Bird, Hoopoe, Quail and Sun-Bird. The monkeys chattered away excitedly in the trees. They seemed to know the day had arrived when the Great Banda, Lord of the Elephants, would be caught by Skanda.

The guests at their breakfasts looked up at the patches of sky visible through the trees. A flock of flamingoes were in full flight with their great wings outspread. Their pink and white coloring changed from pink to white and from white to pink, as they flew away to the coast.

"They have come here all the way from Africa," Skanda said.

The monkeys chattered, scolded and made faces in the ~~xxxxx~~ tree-tops. They leaped about. They threw at them the rinds of the fruit they had been nibbling at. And they threw many other things they had found to their liking in kraal-town, and stolen. A beater's belt, with which he ties up his sarong, came crashing down near their table. This was followed by a volley of fruit -rind and the ominous crash of a chatty, or shallow cooking pot, which broke into a hundred pieces.

"A near miss, Jack," joked Skanda. The monkeys were as gay and happy as anyone could ever be.

"Look Uncle Jack! Look at that monkey! " cried Charlie. "He has got hold of Haneef's fez!"

The black-faced monkey examined the fez carefully. Then he took it off and examined it once more, making faces at them and chattering happily. He put it on again to cover his face.

Everyone burst into laughter. Haneef stood by grinning sheepishly, scratching his shaved head, which was as bare as an apple.

Holding the fez by the tassel, the mischievous monkey leaped about among the branches going ever higher and higher, and never letting go of the tassel. Then he started chewing it up.

Haneef was greatly embarassed. One side of his face twitched convulsively with his nervous tic. "The evil one plucked it off my head as I sat talking to some men," he complained to Skanda.

And then the fez came sailing down from the tree-top. The monkey had decided it had had enough fun with it.

Haneef ran to pick it up. He examined the tassel and hurriedly put his fez on to soothe his ruffled dignity. He seemed a new man as he walked away towards the clearing where the jeeps and lorries were parked, the black tassel swinging in the air.

CHAPTER 6

The morning sun climbed up the sky weaving lovely patterns of shade and light on the fallen leaves of many colors which carpeted the jungle's floor. A herd of spotted deer, in search of water, went off back to cover at a frightened trot.

The fury and noise of the beating was very near the corrall. Skanda, Uncle Jack and Charlie climbed up to the messa again. The Catcher of Elephants carried his elephant-gun, which was a No.12 smooth-bore. The other guests, from all over Ceylon, took up their stations on their own messas around the corrall.

Charlie peered into the jungle. But there was not one elephant in sight. He might have saved himself the trouble. Because of the trees, one couldn't possibly see the elephants. The Catcher of Elephants was tense, standing straight, as if he had a rifle for a spine.

The yelling and shouting increased. Charlie could hear the beating of the drums. The square of beaters were, surely, now inside the funnel of the corrall!

There was a crash and tearing of branches. A tree toppled over. Another tree was plucked by its roots and flung away to one side. Charlie could see the black shape of Kalua, his white tusks shining in the morning light. He

sides to hide in the tree-branches which disguised it.

And now, a wild elephant came into view. Thirsty, dazed and terrified, it hesitated, turning its weary head around looking for an avenue of escape. Its eyes were fevered and pathetic. Its trunk curled this way and that, helplessly, as if for something to hold on to.

But the beaters urged it forward with their shouts and yells. The done-in elephant made a rush towards one of the wings of the funnel. The beaters fired blank cartridges from guns and pistols to drive it back. They yelled themselves hoarse, and shouted insults. And they screamed dah! dah! which is the sound elephants dislike most. Charlie could see the hesitant grey head of another wild elephant peering out of the jungle.

Led by their mahouts, the black Kalua and clever Haami now charged the first elephant from behind. They pushed against its haunches with the base of their trunks. The poor animal could smell the cool and intoxicating water of the pool. Yet it resisted Kalua's and Haami's thrusting with all its strength.

It made another desperate effort to break away. Kalua then quickly moved to its flank, again guided by the mahout, and weighed down on the animal's head with his great tusks. The wild elephant was pinned between them and the ground.

Haami pushed with her forehead from behind to force the wild elephant into the corrall. The sweet smell of water nearly paralyzed the brain of the captive. Then, at the right moment, Kalua released his hold, and the terrified and thirsty animal shot forward through the ear-hole into the play-pen.

It made straight for the pool of water. It plunged into it, spreading the ripples among the pink lotuses and snow-white water lilies.

The second animal, which had been watching the drama from the edge of the jungle, did not need a better example. He smelled the water. Quietly, almost timidly, he walked into the corrall through the ear-hole.

The two captives were followed by another, and yet another. Charlie marvelled to see these great grey shapes of the jungle move into the corral like the waves of the sea. Whenever one tried to break away, the beaters screamed insults, fired blank cartridges, lunged at it with their spears, and shouted dah! dah! which is the sound elephants dislike most. The drummers drummed away, and the dancers danced complicated dances to bless the moment.

Some tired men were sleeping in their huts in the jungle. Others were cooking for the beaters at work.

Many more elephants, led by their mahouts, helped with the drive-in. The most difficult animals were coaxed, bullied or pushed into the play-pen by strong Kalua and clever Haami.

By late noon the beaters rolled the curtain of logs over the ear-hole. The first herd of forty-one elephants was within the play-pen. They were in the pool cooling their fevered skins and slaking their great thirst.

In this dry season when, as Skanda said, kraals are held, they had searched in vain for water-holes. They had found one at last.

Their fevers soothed, their terror returned. They came out of the pool and huddled under the trees for mutual protection. If they only had a determined leader, they could have crashed through the wall of the corrall as if it were made of paper.

But they had been terrified by fire, fevered with thirst and annoyed by the sound they dislike most of all, which is dah! dah! They were confused. There was no leader among them to lead a charge which would have given them death or their freedom.

CHAPTER 7

After lunch the decoy elephants were ridden into the stockade, Kalua and Haami leading them. A mahout sat on the neck of each elephant with his goad, the stick tipped with iron, with which he guided his mount. Behind him

elephant's hind-leg with a loud slap. When the surprised animal raised it, they passed a noose xxxxxxxxx round it. Then they tied the rope to the nearest tree. Or they passed the end of the rope to the mahout who tied it to the collar of his mount. The elephant then led the catch to the nearest tree to which it was quickly tethered by the nooser.

Once a tusker ran round the stockade as if he were on fire. He pointed his head towards the wall of the corrall for a mighty charge. xxxxxxx Kalua, the Black One,had noticed what was about to happen. He stood calmly in front of the herd with his trunk upraised.

The wild elephants paused for a moment as the tusker charged. Kalua stood still. And when the tusker was within reach, he raised his right fore-leg and landed a mighty blow on the wild one's chin. Charlie and all the people on the messas heard the loud thwack of the wild elephant's lower jaw meeting his upper jaw as Kalua's blow connected.

The elephant dropped down on its front knees. Kalua reared up on his hind-legs, pressing its head down with his long tusks.

Two decoys were led by their mahouts to press with their foreheads on both sides of the tusker to knock the wind out of him. One of the noosers then jumped down to slap the tusker's hind-leg with a loud slap. And as the animal raised it, he slipped a noose round it and made the rope fast to the nearest tree.

The beaters had surrounded the walls of the corrall. Whenever a wild elephant ventured too near, trying to break out, they fired their pistols and guns, and thrust through the chinks in the corrall with their long spears. And within the corrall, mahouts, decoys and noosers performed their incredible age-old and colorful ballet in the afternoon sun.

When a nooser was in danger, he clambered up into a tree, or vaulted back to the safety of a decoy'a back. The mahouts watched every movement

have a long, long drink of water.

The other elephants followed him into the pool for a drink. The mahouts led the decoys to the pool's edge to surround Banda. He lifted up his trunk and sprayed them with a powerful torrent of water. Then he got out of the pool, uprooted a tree, and sent it crashing against the decoys.

His herd came out of the pool after him. He watched one of the cow-elephants being noosed and tied to a tree. He filled the air with terrible roars and ran round the baby and the herd to protect them. Banda was angry with the bonfires burning within the stockade, the noise, and the noosers.

The Catcher of Elephants, on the messa, grew restless. "Banda is becoming dangerous," he said. "Elephants make the kindest parents among animals, and they will do anything to protect their young."

The baby elephant was standing on its small legs, waving its small trunk. It was surrounded by the females of the herd who sought to protect it. Banda was the only male among them. He had looked after the herd for many years after driving other male elephants away.

The baby elephant broke away from the protecting females and ran under Banda's belly, his tiny honey-colored eyes shining with fear. The King of the Jungle picked up the baby very gently with his trunk and placed him beside his mother. He trumpetted again with fury and looked around for a way to freedom.

The Catcher of Elephants, on the messa, grew more restless. He knew instinctively, with that instinct all great hunters have, that Banda would not be caught. It would be a matter of freedom or death with this noble beast.

"Banda is becoming very dangerous," he said as if in a trance. "I think he is going to make a break for it. What a great and beautiful animal he is," he said, love and wonder swelling his voice.

Charlie, too, could sense what Banda was about to do. He felt his head

would burst. He wished and wished Banda, the herd and the baby would make a break for it and regain their freedom.

Kalua and Haami were trying to separate Banda from the rest of the herd. If he could be caught, catching the rest of the elephants would be easy. They rammed into his flanks with their heads to knock the wind out of him, while two decoys pushed from behind. Banda reared up on his hind legs and broke the hold. He wheeled round and bit on Kalua's trunk. Kalua sank to his knees. With more trumpetting, he turned on Haami and bit her tail. Then he let go and landed with his forelegs on her back. Haami rolled over to her side, spilling both mahout and nooser. Banda dashed to the opposite end of the corrall, followed by the rest of his herd.

"This is incredible," said the Catcher of Elephants. "What an incredible beast. To break away from a hold like that!"

Banda, the leader of his herd, and the noblest elephant in all Ceylon, knew his last hour had come.

He walked sadly up to the herd and placed his trunk on the little baby's head, blessing him. Then he touched the shoulders of the females in farewell.

He turned around, trumpetted, and lowered his massive head for the great charge that would scatter the walls of the stockade like matchsticks, and open the way to freedom for his trapped herd.

The Catcher of Elephants almost wept as he raised the elephant-gun to his shoulder. He, too, knew the last hour had come. If the noble Banda made the charge, his herd would escape and the beaters who had surrounded the stockade with spears and guns would be crushed to death.

With another loud roar, and his head held low down, Banda then made the great charge which was to live for ever in the story books of the children of Ceylon.

There were tears in Skanda's eyes as he pressed the trigger of the elephant-gun. The shot went right through Banda's ear and brain and stilled

for ever his great love which had made the jungle happy for those he had guarded and protected.

He shook his head to still the pain and he turned around to his herd. He looked at his baby and he looked at his wives, as if to say he was sorry the charge had failed. Then his mighty legs tottered, and he sank to his knees.

Banda, the noblest elephant ever seen in Ceylon, had refused to be caught and tamed. He had been born in freedom, and he had sought freedom in death.

A great sadness now settled on kraal-town. The Catcher of Elephants would not talk to anyone. He left the messa and walked to the enclosure in his jungle hotel where he sat brooding. The beaters were very slow in capturing Banda's herd, and many of them went without dinner that night. And Charlie felt as if he would burst into tears.

CHAPTER 9

It was time for Charlie to leave Ceylon and return to America. The elephant kraal was over, and the captured elephants were at work with their trainers.

Uncle Jack had takne him to the ancient city in the heart of the jungle which was two thousand six hundred years old. There were ancient walls and pillars of stone covered with delicate carvings. He saw stone sculptures of the Lord Buddha sitting on a lotus with a peaceful expression on his face. Lord Buddha founded the religion of Buddhism which most people in Ceylon believe in.

There were Buddhist viharas or churches full of beautiful paintings and tall snow-white dagabas shaped like a bell. They were hundreds of feet high. Near the top they had chambers which contained holy relics of the Lord Buddha or his apostles. In an old vihara, Uncle Jack showed him the oldest tree which had been recorded in history. It was the sacred Bo-Tree, and it had been grown from the branch of the tree Lord Buddha sat

sat under in India. It was more than two thousand five hundred years old.

And now Uncle Jack, who seemed today more sun-burnt than ever, was driving him to Colombo Airport for the return trip to America. On their way, they dropped in on the Catcher of Elephants.

"Hullo, Charlie," said Skanda, "so you are going home. I feel sorry you are going, and I'll miss you."

"I've not forgotten my promise, though," he said.

He walked up to a cabinet of beautiful calamander wood, the dark grain of which was shaped like leaves and flowers and ripples of the sea. He opened it and took out a small lacquered box out of which he brought a bracelet made of the shining black tail hair of an elephant. It was just like the one the Catcher of Elephants wore, and it had been bound into a circle with a strip of gold. The gold and the black made a perfect combination for a bracelet.

"I am sorry it's not from Banda's tail. But do give this to your mother from Uncle Jack and myself," he said. "And I have another thing to show you. Come on."

They walked towards the back of the house where his three cars stood neatly in the garage. And even before he reached it, Charlie saw the baby elephant. It was standing on his small legs in a corner of the garage, sleeping. His mother was munching at a block of the fibrous kitul-palm trunk to keep her teeth in condition.

"I hope he grows to be as brave as his father," said the Catcher of Elephants, with love in his voice.

They had a Ceylonese lunch after that. It was even more elaborate than any lunch or dinner Charlie had had in Ceyloh. He tried to eat as much as possible of every dish so he would remember Ceylon and Skanda. He even tried a bit of the eight different freshly made chutneys which were in a curious dish with eight sections. He had a pimson and orunge ex mango. And

curious dish with eight sections. He had a crimson and orange mango. And he washed the tips of his fingers in rose-water, feeling he was in a strange, strange country.

"Oh, I almost forgot," said the Catcher of Elephants. "I promised to tell why you men never find an elephant grave-yard, or the bodies of elephants when they die."

He took out a small box, out of his writing-desk, and gave Charlie six little seeds which were bright red in color. They were as small as lentil seeds, and had the same shape.

"What are these?" said Charlie, who was very puzzled.

"I'll show you," said the Catcher of Elephants. He opened one of the seeds, which was fitted together like a box, and poured out from inside the tiniest pieces of carved ivory Charlie had ever seen.

"Just look at them," said Skanda. "They are elephants!"

And Charlie could see they were elephants, all right, with trunks and tails and legs and merry little eyes. And in each seed there were about fifty elephants.

Uncle Jack and Skanda burst out laughing. "This is what happens to elephants when they die," said the Catcher of Elephants.

"They have written a poem about it in Ceylon, and you may like to hear it," said he, and he began reciting:

We do it then, they all explained, when elephants must die,
They go and find a Bury-Tree, and under it they lie;
And lying theere very, very, still, they neither eat nor drink,
But die in peace and start to shrink, and shrink, and shrink.

And then, Uncle Jack, Skanda and Charlie laughed together as the Catcher of Elephants wrote out the poem, before he caught the plane for America.

THE END

UNCLE SIVAM AND THE BRITISH

Hearty Uncle Sivam, Oxford double Blue (boxing and cricket), is the pride of our Ceylonese family and of our village of Atchuvely. He belongs to a newer breed of Atchuvelians than those I have already described. As a southpaw bantamweight youth he showered glory on Ceylon and the resident Englishmen and Scotsmen patronized him in a make-believe that he was near-English himself.

Uncle Sivam had been the first Ceylonese to shine in an Inter-Varsity Meet, and he had even shaken hands with King George VI during one of those cricket fixtures called Gentlemen vs. Players--the players being professionals and the others being, well, gentlemen, which was all to the good.

Under British Protection, which lasted until 1948, it was good to play cricket. "Well played, sir!" meant approval, and "That was not cricket," condemnation. It was the most democratic game invented. It all depended on teamwork. Which was the reason Uncle Sivam toiled manfully in the murderous hot sun, six hours a day, two days a week and sometimes three, as if to say he was good as any Englishman. Some thought the long-drawn-out and phlegmatic game injurious to the human system in the tropics. The shorter games like polo and field hockey, both Indian games, were being adopted by the British, along with jodhpurs and pajamas.

Uncle Sivam flourished under the British. He swilled beer in the Colombo cricket pavilion and sang "Wrap Me Up in My Old Tarpaulin Jacket" and "Tipperary" in his fruity Ceylonese voice. When he produced his piece de resistance, "Maquita, Maquita, I Love You, Maquita," it brought the house down, and the Cockney cricketer from Cargills, Ltd., who was barred from the Princes and Garden Clubs because of his accent, soon became starry-eyed. Uncle Sivam's only regret was that he could not fox-hunt in England every year with the Much Hadham Pack, along with his friend Sir Marcellus

--from the pen of the celebrated Govind Chunder Dutt. As always, Uncle Sivam was quick on the uptake, and always on the mark. That is why we respected and admired him.

He was irrepressible in his admiration of the British. One Sunday, long ago, I must tell you, he accompanied the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police to the scene of a crime. He was a fledging lawyer then, about to defend a murderer.

On the way, the Magistrate's wife was dropped off at the Sunday fair. When the journey was resumed, Uncle Sivam lit a cigarette without permission. "Mr. Sivam, dear sir," protested the Magistrate, "you must not smoke. You must understand the Court is still sitting. It's a legal fiction, so to say, of course, but wherever the Magistrate goes, the Court goes." Uncle Sivam apologized suitably, and threw the cigarette out the window.

On the return journey, the carriage stopped at the fair to pick up the Magistrate's wife, whereupon Uncle Sivam gallantly volunteered to look for the lady. He jumped out of the carriage, wandered about the crowd for a while, and returning announced in his best Court manner: "Sir, the Court's wife wishes me to inform the Court that the Honourable Court's wife is busy buying vegetables."

After years of monkeying at the bar, Uncle Sivam has become rich and is now Member of Parliament for Colombo South. He was, of course, one of the United National Party M.P.s who voted to keep Ceylon in the British Commonwealth. He is in the public eye, and contrives to remain there by sponsoring beauty competitions among village girls all over the island. Though this foreign institution is anathema to the people, it gets him into the English-language papers that are read in Colombo. Perhaps it is for this same reason that he has acquired, as have other public men such as Sir Bougainvillaea Weerasekera, Sir Tudor Tissera, and Sir Samarasekera Lunuwilla, a string of race horses. The Colombo Race Meet rivals Ascot, and surpasses

it in the colorful saris, blouses, and sunshades that protect the ladies.

Uncle Sivam, in common with most of his friends, believes in English education. Most of them have been to England or the English-style University of Ceylon. The Varsity Rag in Ceylon far outdoes Cambridge or Oxford, both in virulence and brilliance. And Uncle Sivam never misses the Royal-Thomian or the Law-Medical cricket matches. Based on the Eton-Harrow matches, these events gain in accoutrements every year, whereas the Eton boys no longer wear their top hats.

Since the dawn of independence, Uncle Sivam's ties with the British have grown stronger than ever. His three sons are being educated in England, while his daughter copes with English thought at Cheltenham Ladies' College. He hopes she will be presented at Court next year.

He himself hopes to be knighted by Queen Elizabeth, towards which end he is engaged in many charitable and other works. In some of the commercial firms that he owns, the principals are Englishmen recently imported from England, and many of his friends are knights--Sir John Kotelawala, Sir Edward Nugewala, Sir Chittampalam Gardiner, Sir Claude Corea, Sir Donatus Victoria, and Sir Oliver Goonetilleke.

His name was not among those honored at New Year's, but we all hope that Uncle Sivam's fondest dream will be realized when the Queen's next birthday honors are published.

Elizam had no choice in the matter. Her wishes, her own decision to dispose of her future as she wanted, if she had thought about it at all, had not been given a moment's thought by anybody. I was only a child, but people were always asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and they seemed to be very much interested when I replied "a doctor" or "an engineer." I had that freedom of choice, but Elizam had not, and it made me furious.

Although she was ten years older than I was, I felt that I understood her, and I was sure that Elizam did not wish to leave us. But the fate that had seemingly blessed her two elder sisters had now overtaken her, and she looked miserable on the morning she was married. Her big eyes, framed by long lashes, had lost their usual brilliance.

She was dressed as I had never seen her before. A gay wedding sari had replaced the simple bodice and sarong she had worn ever since I could remember. Rubies set in gold hung from her ears. Gold bangles tinkled at her wrists. Around her neck she wore the traditional gold ornaments--a choker with pendant, a triple gold chain, and the thali or wedding necklace. The jewelry had been given as a dowry by my mother. Elizam would have been given more if she had been married off in our village like her sisters. They had received cottages on Grandfather-with-the-Beard's estate for as long as it belonged to our family, as well as the right to farm a bit of the land.

For Elizam Mother provided only clothes and jewelry. It was sufficient that Mother had found her a husband who could support her and her children. Elizam's chocolate complexion was not popular in the marriage market, so that even a poor farmer was a "catch" on which Mother congratulated herself. But Elizam did not seem grateful.

I hated the bridegroom as soon as I set eyes on him. He was a chuvvalai, or fair-complexioned man, not much taller than Elizam, who was big for a Ceylonese girl. He arrived in his bullock cart from his farm at Kantalai, about twenty miles from Trincomalee, to have a look at Elizam before giving his consent. I could tell from the way Elizam hid in the kitchen and refused to come out that she didn't want to get married.

Mother called to the girl several times as if she had some household task for her, but Elizam knew there was a suitor around the place and wouldn't emerge. Then Mother asked me to call her, but Elizam knew that I had been put up to it.

When it was time for tea, it was her cousin Sita who served it. Elizam still hid in the kitchen, and no amount of threats from Mother could make her come out. But Mother was not really angry. She was hugely amused at Elizam's shyness, a natural and proper attribute of a bride-to-be. But Elizam was not just being coy. She didn't want to be married at all. She had been with us most of her life--in Atchuvely, in Singapore, and in Malaya--and she wanted to stay on.

The farmer could have peeped into the kitchen, but that would have been undignified. It is not really necessary to see a bride before marriage. If she is seen at all, it is only by accident--at most an accident that had been staged by one of the parties. The farmer waited patiently, however, chewing his betel leaf and tobacco as if he belonged to the house.

I can't remember what eventually brought Elizam out. It may have been the arrival of the vegetable or oil seller. Anyway the farmer saw her full, strapping figure by the kitchen door--the kitchen was a separate building--and he went away well content, having given his promise. He may not even have noticed the beautiful molding of her oval face.

When Elizam got married she was saying good-by to her childhood. Like her sisters and cousins, she must have joined us when she was two or three. Her parents and the parents of her cousins lived in cottages on Grandfather-with-the-Beard's estate in Atchuvely village. Their children were sent into the service of my grandfather or that of his children up in Trincomalee. If they received any pay at all, it was sent to their parents, but they had a comfortable home and as soon as they reached the age of seventeen or eighteen were married off with a small dowry. That was one duty we had toward them.

Elizam called us by our own names, which was forbidden our other servants. Though she did not attend school, as we did, it was she who dressed us for school. She saw to it that we got there safe and was always there by the school gates at four to see us home again. In the mornings, between classes, she or her cousin Sita brought our glasses of milk.

She rubbed our bodies with sessame oil on Saturdays and then bathed us after we had run about under the morning sun for an hour or two. Earlier in the day she had boiled limes, cheekakai pods, and basela meal. She shampooed our hair with the mixture and then rubbed in the limes. The rinses left our hair softer and glossier than any patent shampoo could have done. It was she who arranged our visits to the harbor and the various beaches of Trincomalee. Once a year when we camped in the jungle at Madhu or Paalai Oothu, it was she who slept with us beside the campfire. When the wild boar was brought in, it was Elizam who broiled the first pieces, though she was not the regular cook, and she always gave me the largest piece. She packed parcels of the meat to send to relatives and dried the rest under the sun. When we brought green mangoes that we had stoned down from a nearby grove she secretly dressed them with salt and chili for a relish which we loved dearly but which was forbidden by Mother.

She was always preparing surprises for us. As we dug into our dinner of rice and several curries, with her fond voice coaxing us on, we would come across all kinds of delicacies hidden under the rice--eggs, chicken legs, fried shrimps, cuttlefish or roe, soft-shelled crabs, stuffed bitter gourd, fried wild boar, fish baked in ashes, meat wrapped in leaves, or a quail so tiny that you could eat its wafer-thin bones.

Elizam was the household expert on the preparation of that king of soups we called kool, whose only occidental equivalent I can think of is Provencal bouillabaisse. This main-dish soup is a north Ceylon specialty, and Elizam knew all its village mysteries.

On our family's kool day, a day to which we looked forward because there were no tiresome solid chunks of meat and vegetable to eat, Elizam superintended all the stages of its preparation, from the buying of fish to its eating. It was her special day in the kitchen. The matrix of the soup was made of a flour ground from the plumules of palmyra seeds. In it floated grains of rice and bright red stars of chili. Into the pot went tiny dried and fresh fish, medium pink fish and medium blue fish, small crabs, large crabs quartered, fillets of more fish along with their heads, the chestnuts of the jack fruit, the crisp fleshly jacket of jack seeds, tiny immature jack fruit cut into wedges, large "double shrimps," and the leaves of a certain creeper with red fruit that had a special rough texture which was delightful to chew.

In Trincomalee we always ate the soup out of bowls, but the way Elizam served it back in Atchuvely village was out of individual cups made of the glaucous jack leaf. Elizam herself took charge of the pot, ladling it out with her long shapely arm, her blue-black hair done into a very large bun at the back. Even mother, who often superintended our dinners, left the kool ceremony to Elizam.

Another village ritual perpetuated by Elizam in our urban surroundings was eating the pulp off the large palmyra seeds after they had been dipped in a weak solution of tamarind. It is a messy but delightful business. For the poor of the village it was sufficient dinner. When we went on hikes with the Boy Scouts she gave us parcels of kattu choru. Cooked eggs, meats, fish, vegetables, and rice were wrapped and pinned with a palm sliver in banana leaf and placed in a palm-[illegible] The banana leaf, which cooked in the slow heat of the food inside it, flavored everything delicately. We also loved her palanchoru, which is cooked rice left overnight in water and made into balls filled with delicacies like shrimp or turtle meat. The proper way to eat it is off a small banana leaf held in the right hand.

Then there were Elizam's pattchadis. Between her cousin Sita and herself, all the pattchadis of Atchuvely were made available for our table. Pattchadi of bananas, pattchadi of eggplants, pattchadi of dried fish or shrimps, all baked in ashes, pattchadis of green ginger, neem flowers, lotus roots, banana inflorescences and their purple spathes, hibiscus blooms, heart of banana stem, portulacas, edible leaves of weeds, and tender stems of pirandai thandu creepers.

All this was now about to end. Elizam's younger sister Innesu, who had been brought up in Grandfather-with-the-Beard's household, had come up to take her place, but things would never be the same again without Elizam. Her father, who had come up from the village, was hilarious with the many guests. He was tipsy on arrack. But her mother was crying quietly, and I could see that Elizam would cry too before long. She was a wife now, this was her going-away party, but she looked very upset.

As is usual in Ceylonese weddings, the men were in the drawing room and the women in another part of the house. Being only eight, I was allowed to wander from one part of the house to the other. The men who liked a drink took trips to the small bar almost hidden away in a corner. That is also a tradition--to

do the drinking away from the general company so as not to give offense.

The whole house was reeking with the pungent odor of black Jaffna Cheroots. Many of the guests were hardened smokers from the north, including Elizam's mother, who smoked her own home-grown in a clay pipe. The teetotalers dug into the plates of tidbits and slaked their thirst with quantities of lime juice and carbonated water.

The time was drawing near for Elizam's departure. The koorai, or special wedding sari (which would become an heirloom), was carried in on a brass tray by my mother and offered to each guest in turn, who touched it with the right hand for good luck.

After I touched Elizam's sari I went to the study room and opened my desk. I wrote in Tamil on a sheet of paper: "Dear Elizam, Come back to see us soon. Thurairajah." I went to my mother's room and saw the koorai sari on the brass tray on the side table. I took a pin out of the sewing box and pinned my note on one of the inside folds. Elizam was bound to find it the first time she wore the sari.

The bridegroom had now drawn up his cart and two bullocks in front of the house. Accompanied by the women, Elizam came out and got into the front seat. There were tears in her eyes.

The bridegroom cracked his stick and the bullock cart creaked up the rose-pink gravel road on which the sun lay like golden coins. My brothers and I and our neighbors the Wambeek boys ran behind the rattling cart as fare as the first crossroads. Through the thatch roof of the cart we saw Elizam turn around to have a last look at us. She did not wave.

I can't even remember whether we lit Chinese firecrackers at Elizam's wedding. Maybe we did.

That day Elizam cooked for us her famous kool in her tidy thatched cottage, with jack fruit from her own tree, palmyra shoots from her own beds, and rice from her own fields, but we did not know then it would be our last. She died soon after in childbirth.

Elizam's sister, who looked very much like her, grew more dear to us as the years passed. Today we are as fond of her as we were of Elizam. She too was married off at the age of eighteen. But at that time we were much older and better able to appreciate the festivity of the occasion.

I distinctly remember that we did light Chinese firecrackers at Innesu's wedding.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER AND THE DEVILS

There were two main buildings facing each other on Grandfather-with-the-Beard's estate in Atchuvely, with a courtyard between, shaded by mango and jack trees. On our school vacations from Trincomalee on the east coast, my five brothers and I had a room in the building where Grandfather lived. But the other, called the salai, or reception hall, was our favorite. It was spacious. One side of it was open to the courtyard and the sky, which let in the breezes and the sunshine. It was in a room attached to this building that our Great-grandfather lived, a somewhat solitary figure. He had his meals on his own there (he found our modern custom of eating off porcelain plates irritating) and, like an autocrat, conducted a life of his own which seemed curiously unrelated to the rest of the household.

It may be it was his age that made him seem so withdrawn. But people said that he had been a gay young man, and even gayer husband, father, and then grandfather. He had had only one child--my maternal grandmother--and this estate, which had once belonged to him, he had given as a dowry to Grandfather-with-the-Beard, who had grown the beard as a mark of grief when Grandmother died. Great-grandfather's grief took the shape of retiring to a life of his own in the salai and having little to do with the people in the building opposite.

He was very free with all of his great-grandchildren, though. He welcomed us in the salai, which was otherwise closed to all except certain privileged visitors, and there was nothing he seemed to like better than going out on country rambles with us--except perhaps his arrack! In his old age he was an enthusiastic rambler.

If a mango bruises, it rots before it ripens.

Whether the sale was of mango, coconut, rice, or tobacco, Great-grandfather gave my brothers and me a rake-off on the deal, for our interest in the matter; and then we made off to the shops at the kittangi, or Junction, which was the focal point of Atchuvely, for a spree of spending. He was generous with his money. When my maternal uncle was a child, and Great-grandfather was the renter of the toddy and arrack taverns in our parts, he never banked the loose change, we were told, but brought it home in a bundle and flung the coins on his bed for my uncle to play with and then take them to his mother. On our spending sprees at the Junction, Great-grandfather sometimes accompanied us, and then we felt important. People were attentive when he was around.

One of the earliest memories I have of Great-grandfather is that he took me and my elder brother, Rutnam, to our first yakkun nettuma, or devil dance. We were at the small town of Kelaniya, near Colombo, visiting relatives before a wedding in the family. My mother was against the visit at first, but the old man's wishes prevailed; he said it was important for members of his family to be familiar with such things. I was three and a half years old at the time, and I remember that I wore a black velvet suit with innumerable buttons that my parents had bought for me in Singapore, and of which I was very proud.

We arrived after dinner at a neighbor's house, where as Great-grandfather explained, a woman of the household had been possessed by the devil. She had the obvious signs--disheveled hair and fits. The exorcising would continue throughout the night until noon next day.

The devil dancer, was dressed in tight white stockings and a red jacket gleaming with strings of many-colored beads and glass. Great metal bracelets circled his arms. He held a torch in one hand, and he threw resin on it, which punctuated the dance with flashes. As the drummer's tempo

increased, the dancer whirled intricately with a clash of anklet bells. He wore over his face one of the lesser Mahasona (devil) masks, which he replaced with more and more frightening masks as the dance proceeded. The dancing and chanting rose in intensity as the dancer wooed Mahasona with false flattery, to make him come out and make himself comfortable in the assembled company. At midnight his terrible routing would begin. But we left long before that.

On our way home, with the drums still throbbing in our ears, Rutnam and I felt apprehensive, since, when the routing begins, Mahasona is so furious that he rampages around wrecking vengeance on everybody he meets. We looked uneasily at the patches of inky blackness under the banyans and breadfruit trees. "Do you think the routing has begun?" Rutnam whispered. "I don't know," I replied. "Great-grandfather," I asked timidly, "has the routing begun?" "Don't worry, the pootham (demon) won't touch us," he reassured us, brandishing his stick. But we guessed he was just as anxious as we were to get home.

We went back to the devil dance next day. The dancer's tired feet now dragged on the ground, and his voice was hoarse, but he still danced. Then he steeled himself for a final crescendo of whirling movements and fell down flat on his back. His assistant ran up to him and, placing a pumpkin on his chest, slashed it in two with a single stroke of a knife. The dance of destruction had begun. The dancer whirled through the place slashing at the decorations and the stage, bringing it all down in an orgy of destruction. Every few seconds he produced a blinding flash by throwing whole handfuls of resin on the blazing torch. The Possessed One still sat on her specially constructed platform of areca-nut wood, but she seemed cured! It left a powerful impression on my brother Rutnam and me. It was the dramatization of the magical world which, ever since I can remember, Great-grandfather had made real for us.

After the dance, we made Great-grandfather draw his cabalistic figure on the ground and drive a piece of iron into its middle to keep Mahasona at bay. He knew all the secrets, having been tutored by our village magician.

The village magician was the man who visited Great-grandfather most often. In spite of his magic, there was nothing fearful about his appearance. Small and gentle-mannered, he thrust his head shyly to one side when Great-grandfather talked to him. Even if he was not shy, that was the proper thing to do. It showed respect. Though the magician was of a lower caste, not usually allowed to enter the house or to sit down, Great-grandfather allowed him to enter and sit on a mat beside his bed because of his magic. The man could exorcise a curse or cause anybody to fall ill by burying some of the victim's hair or his nail parings in front of his house, with some other things--chicken liver, oxblood--or by making an image of the victim and driving nails into it. That was the reason Great-grandfather's nail parings were carefully buried by the village barber! The magician and Great-grandfather often spoke in whispers when Great-grandfather got out his magical texts inscribed on dry palm leaves with a stylus. He plied the low-caste man with arrack, which was also against village etiquette, and the magician often nipped out to bring in more bottles. Grandfather-with-the-Beard frowned when he saw the apologetic magician enter. Grandfather disapproved of necromancy. But he could never stop Great-grandfather, old as he was, from doing anything he wanted to. No one had that much authority, since Great-grandfather was our oldest relative, except for our other Great-grandfather over in the Junction--but he did not belong to our household.

Sometimes the village magician and Great-grandfather called one of us children and showed us a piece of glass on which there was a round or triangular spot made of some black substance concocted to a magical formula. "Do you see anything?" they asked. Often we did not. But sometimes we thought we saw a human figure or an animal, which interested them greatly.

"The formula was right!" the magician whispered happily, and Great-grandfather looked impressed.

As a child, there were three things about Great-grandfather that especially interested me--his nostrils, his earrings, and his eating habits. The most wonderful thing about him were his nostrils. A long thin nose ended, surprisingly, in large open nostrils, set in well-formed side bulbs. They were like tents, or rooms, and I often found myself staring into their sunlit interiors. His earrings were the heaviest I have ever seen on a man. Other men in our village wore earrings but none so magnificent a pair as Great-grandfather. Triple-bobbed and heavy and fashioned in gold, they made his ears long like those on Gupta statues of the Lord Buddha, for centuries a mark of good breeding. When he moved, they swung gracefully, lending dignity to his sun-tanned face.

When he had his meals in solitary splendor, in the salam, we children crowded round him. Sitting on a high calamander bed, he ate off a large banana-leaf plate placed on top of the teapoy. Great-grandfather wouldn't eat off real plates. He considered them unclean, and he said curry tasted better on a leaf plate. Beside it was placed a bowl of water and a gold pin. If a grain of rice fell on the teapoy, he picked it up with the pin and washed it in the bowl. It was a sin to waste even a single grain of rice, and he quoted the first-century quatrain of Avveiyar:

> We toil, we beg, move across the seas,
> Worship, rule, make music, erect our songs;
> All this to keep this wretched body of ours,
> Which tortures us for a grain of rice.

Great-grandfather was the best storyteller in the village--chiefly about his own adventures among the demons and goblins and of his fighting against the British. Sitting on his high bed or lying in a Singapore chair,

which is a blond deck chair of cane and bamboo, he followed the narrative with gestures of his great hands, making the locomotive and temple bell talk: "dongdong-dongdong-dongdong," "chukuchuku-chukuchuku-chukuchuku." He even made the ordinary words onomatopoeic: "F-l-e-e-e-e-e-w away," "r-a-a-a-a-i-n." The awesome, hushed voice he adopted when speaking of the devil varied with a more normal one for narrating his own part in the story. When he came to dramatic passages, the prominent veins by his right eye and on his throat swelled and throbbed with excitement, and his faded head knot trembled. After getting through some particularly awesome details, he would exclaim loudly, "And so the Prince and Princess were married and lived happily ever after." It had nothing whatever to do with the story, but it was bluff in case mother was listening. She disliked Great-grandfather speaking to us about demons, though she never said so outright.

He couldn't understand why the others in the household, except for our old nurse Aachi, were not interested in devils and magic, since knowledge of them was important to preserve the family and to ward off misfortune.

Some of the stories he had heard himself as a child, and they were a part of him. What is good for one child is good for another, was the way he looked at it.

One of Great-grandfather's favorite stories concerned <u>his</u> great-grandfather, a famous magician who knew how to transform a demon into a girl by driving a sliver of wood into the skull. One day he brought one of these demon girls home to his wife. "This girl will do the work of four men and eat very little," he said. And sure enough that was what happened.

But one day the demon girl came home from the jungle carrying a four-man load of firewood on her head. She went to his great-grandmother, who was slicing areca nuts. "Lady," the demon girl said, "a sliver of firewood has entered my head. Could you please take it out?"

His great-grandmother was shortsighted. She could not distinguish between a magic sliver of wood and a piece of firewood. She yanked the magic wood out with her areca-nut cutter, which is made on the principle of a nutcracker. There was a terrible scream, and the demon vanished in smoke.

The demon returned that very evening and threw a flaming sword across the entrance to the house. "May no first-born male child over twenty-one live in this family for five generations!" the demon girl cursed. And sure enough that became true.

There was a catch in the curse, though. Would it apply for four generations only and exclude the fifth, or include it? My uncle, his grandson, who was of the fifth generation, fell seriously ill at the age of twenty-one, but he recovered. Great-grandfather never told us whether he had anything to do with the event. He and the magician never discussed such important matters in our presence.

The impact of his stories on me was devastating. I had terrifying dreams at night. When darkness fell, I thought of the devils in the neem trees at the edge of the estate--the neem is a tree devils like. When we passed the cemetery I hurried on. A solitary lamp burned there all night in a grilled niche on the tomb of Grandmother--lighted every evening at six by Grandfather-with-the-Beard--which kept evil spirits away. But the other tombs had no lights.

During our long country walks in the evenings with Great-grandfather, we were constantly in touch with his world of magic. He found offerings to spirits hung on the trees, in pots, and in bamboo cradles, and sacrifices of eatables and flowers on banana leaves alongside the paths. When we came across a karagam he would pause, study it and mutter "Hm," very significantly. A karagam is a pot of terra cotta or brass, full of water and decorated with a tall cone of mango leaves, oleander, coconut flowers, and a lime stuck

by day--a fantastic village, full of unknown sounds and shapes.

When it thundered at night, Great-grandfather went with us in the mornings to hunt for spear-shaped muchrooms that the thunder had brought out, quite unlike any other mushrooms I have ever seen. The bright red earth of Atchuvely split with the thunder (or so I thought) and the mushrooms peeped through the cracks like pale pink animals. It was one of the most magical things for me. When curried, they didn't taste like mushrooms but flesh.

When it drizzled, we set out with Great-grandfather and two men for the rice fields. They smoked out small, furred animals that lived in burrows. No one else in our family liked eating these field creatures, and we children didn't like the flesh of the sea turtle; but he liked them both, which again conferred some weird distinction on him.

One of the strangest events connected with Great-grandfather concerned the disappearance of my younger brother Singam from the house. It led to my loss of faith in his world of magic.

This was how it happened. One day my older brother told us confidentially that he didn't think Great-grandfather could have possibly routed devils. They didn't exist!

My younger brother Singam and I pooh-poohed the idea. It was ridiculous. Why, our old nurse Aachi knew all the same stories. Only a few days ago she had repeated to us the one about his magician great-grandfather.

"But Mother doesn't believe them," Rutnam went on. "In fact, she doesn't like us listening."

"That is because she thinks they may frighten us," Singam said stubbornly. "But I am not frightened. Are you?"

"Great-grandfather is cleverer than you think," I added. "Why do you think the magician comes to see him?"

"He likes arrack. That's why! What do you think? I heard the story about fighting against the British can't be true. The British came here long before Great-grandfather was born."

"Who told you that?" I asked angrily.

"Oh, I heard!"

"Come, let's ask Great-grandfather!" I cried.

"All right, let's ask him," Rutnam said.

We looked for him in the salai. He wasn't there. He must be watching the bringing down of the morning's palmyra toddy. So much the better. We would be given our share of the toddy, and we liked drinking it under the palms anyway. We headed for the palmyra groves. Each tree was marked with a white excise stamp. Great-grandfather was watching Velu, our tree climber, bringing down the earthenware pots that dangled from his belt.

"Ha!" Great-grandfather exclaimed, his eyes twinkling. "So you have come for your toddy?"

Velu's cheerful face broke into his easy smile as soon as he saw us. His chin was rough with gray stubble. "I haven't enough palm-leaf bowls for you, Little Brothers," he said, and he darted up the tree again agile as a monkey.

He cut down a leaf and then made it into boat-shaped drinking vessels, which he rinsed out with a little toddy and then filled up.

Holding them in both hands--quite the professional way--we drank the young, bubbly palm wine, which had not yet reached its full strength.

Great-grandfather drained his man-sized bowl in one draught, holding his breath, and then threw it away on the ground.

"Great-grandfather," brother Rutnam then began, "Cousin Rajah thinks you could not have fought against the British. You were not old enough." So it was Cousin Rajah who doubted. I felt annoyed with him.

"What do you mean?" Great-grandfather exclaimed, and stared at him from under stern, white eyebrows. "How does Rajah know how old I am? I am much older than you think!"

That settled the question for us. Rutnam could not think of anything to say, and I was happy.

But he was not convinced by Great-grandfather's reply. Though he continued to attend the story-telling, and enjoyed it as much as anyone else, he adopted a superior attitude about it afterward, much to my annoyance and Singam's.

"Oh you will find out," he threatened.

One sultry afternoon, my brothers and I were two-a-bed for our siesta. We were used to sharing since we often camped, all in a bed roll, in the jungle. We were bored. The afternoon breeze rustled the mango leaves pleasantly, but no sleep would come.

"Let us ask Great-grandfather for a story," Singam said.

"Oh no," brother Rutnam replied, "he will be resting." Singam and I jumped out of bed all the smme and went, followed by Rutnam. Nayagam, who trailed us wherever we went, waddled more slowly behind. He was only three years old at the time.

We entered the <u>salai</u> and saw Great-grandfather lounging in the Singapore chair, a newspaper spread on his chest. He stared at us with wide-open eyes, guessing the nature of our mission.

"Please, Great-grandfather, a story!" I said.

"A story!" he grunted. "You should be asleep."

"But we can't sleep," I said.

He looked sternly at us. "Don't you know what is happening?"

"What?" Rutnam asked.

"The devil is out collecting children in his sack on his annual holiday. You'd better get back to bed and sleep!" he said, and Nayagam looked frightened.

"How do you know?" Rutnam asked.

"I can tell!"

That settled it for me. "Let us hide," I said, and grabbing Nayagam by his hand ran back to our room. We climbed into bed and covered ourselves with thick blankets, although it was hot. To this day I can remember the exact color of that sweltering darkness. My ears were alert to sounds outside, and I kept thinking of the devil going his rounds, his sack full of children.

"Can you hear the devil?" Nayagam asked.

"No!" I replied, swallowing hard.

We must have sat there for about half an hour. I wondered why Rutnam and Singam had not come in with us.

"Big Brother," I called, "are you there?" But there was no reply. Finally I rushed out of the room, followed by Nayagam. I would have been glad to see anybody at that moment.

"Have you seen Singam and Big Brother?" I asked Mother, who was in her room playing dice/a game with a friend.

"No. What's the matter?" she asked.

"The devil is stealing children to eat them!" shouted Nayagam.

"Did Great-grandfather tell you that?" Mother asked.

"Yes."

"You silly children! Don't you know Great-grandfather <u>makes up</u> most of his stories?"

"No!" I said incredulously.

"Yes, he makes them up. And only very old people believe in magic, as he does. I don't believe in demons, and neither should you. Now go back and get some sleep."

I was astonished by Mother's lack of concern. Rutnam walked in as I was sitting in our room thinking it all over. And then in a flash it struck me! If Mother didn't believe in demons, they couldn't possibly exist!

"Hullo." Rutnam said, "still busy giving the pootham the slip?"

"Where is Singam?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said.

"But he was with you."

"I dared him to come out for a walk with me, and he did. I called at Velu's for a young coconut, and then he just disappeared. I suppose he is hiding from the devil."

"Come on, let's look for him," I said. "What if he has run away to Jaffna Town?"

We went looking for him in the salai. "Have you seen Singam anywhere, Great-grandfather?" Rutnam asked him.

"He has run away. He is hiding from the Devil," Nayagam told him.

"Oh, is he? Well then, let's look for him." he said, rising from the Singapore chair.

We searched for him at the servants' cottages, the farmers' cottages, and finally at the tree climber's.

"He was with your Big-Great-Grandson a short while ago, but he didn't stay for a coconut," the tree climber said.

"Which way did he go?" Great-grandfather asked.

"I don't know! He merely said 'I am going now' when I brought down the coconuts, and ran out of the gate, I will help you to look for him! Gundu! Luxman!" Velu called to his sons, and they came out of the cottage. "Gundu, you go to the Junction to see whether Little Brother Singam is there, and you, Luxman, go to the Stone House!"

We went with Velu and asked at the nearby cottages. Not one had seen Singam. We then skirted the estate, thinking we might see him somewhere

in the distance. We didn't know where to look next.

And then we found him. We were in the tamarind grove near the tree climber's. And as we passed the thick trunk of its oldest and noblest tree, there he was on the other side, as still as a statue. He looked like a small Buddha, sitting right in the middle of the cabalistic figure Great-grandfather had drawn there the previous day. He had planted an iron rod off a scrap heap inside it. Singam made no attempt to get up. He seemed frozen to the spot.

Great-grandfather stared at him thoughtfully, and then helped him up. "What are you up to?" he asked.

"Keeping the devil off," he chattered. "I must take the iron home."

After that I was filled with doubts about Great-grandfather's world of magic. "You will find out!" Rutnam had threatened, and so I had. Singam's continuing faith, so boldly expressed, made no difference. Though I continued to enjoy his stories, in a different way, Mother had destroyed the excitement and wonder for me, and it was lost forever. It joined the other childhood illusions I had lost--for instance, that the house lizard with its chirping can warn people of danger, or that the cobra grows a diamond in its head which it spits out each night and carefully guards, and which is the most valuable in the world if any man can find it.

The last time I saw Great-grandfather was in 1937, when he was past his hundredth year. The village magician was there, drinking his arrack, sitting on a chair this time. Great-grandfather looked older and milder, and in fact, a nice old man. He was glad to see me.

I reminded him of the day he had told us the demon was collecting children in his sack. He looked at me with his faded, brown eyes, forgetfully, not really knowing which of his innumerable great-grandchildren I was, and then said, "I believe he was!" He flicked his thumb at the

magician and added, "Now you are big, perhaps he will teach you some of his mantrams (magic incantations)."

The magician giggled, holding his head to one side, as he always did when Great-grandfather talked to him. When Grandfather-with-the-Beard walked in, he took the situation in at a glance. "Still talking of magic?" he asked good-humoredly.

A year later Great-grandfather was dead--of old age. I was in England. I remembered the village magician then. He must have been one of the most bereft of all.

Though Great-grandfather's tomb in our village has no lamp burning over it all night, as his daughter's has, I feel sure, as the old wives of Atchuvely say, that the goblins and demons keep well clear of it. They must know that there lies someone who held them at bay for more than a hundred years.

visits to Kkeri Malai (Mongoose Hill) by car or horse-carriage for a swim in the fresh-water tank by the sea, the lunch at a Brahmin boutique there where we had to ask for santhem, if we wanted more rice, and not for chora which was the colloquial word we used in case the Brahmins felt insulted, and the siesta afterwards in one of the public mandapams built by rich land-owners on the rush mats we had taken along, since they were much cooler in the northern heat than mattresses. Uncle Aru was a stickler for detail and before we got into the horse-carriage or car saw to it that towels and the exact number of mats were there (he had a horror of hired mats) and last of all he peeled off the exact number of five notes, always in rupees, which he handed to his son, our cousin Rajah. Thin and ascetic looking, with a finely carved eagle head topped with white hair, he was active like a bird, with his small height and nervous gestures. He planned our holiday for us with meticulous detail and we were always sure of the boxes of fireworks that each holiday he sent for from Jaffna, the trip the trip to the bottomless well near Kopay (they had dropped down chains and never touched bottom) and the silver rupee he gave each of us when he left. Every evening, when we were doing nothing else, he would hand over a gun and some cartiridges to Rajah, to take us hunting for pigeon and snipe. My brothers and I cannot remember a single evening when we didn't bring back some birds.

Tall and handsome, cousin Rajah was somewhat of a poet quoting quatrains from the first century poetess Avveiyar. He knew pieces not only from her two chief collections Attichudi and Kondai Veynden, but her other collections as well, like Mudurai, Nalvazhi, Gnana Kural

and Kalvicozhukam. He was studying for a science degree at the University College in Colombo (he is today a Government Agent tied up in forms and red tape) but I always remember him as a poet with his face lifted to the sky. The hunting was part of the poetry of the open air, the palmyrah groves, the rice fields and the birds. I felt too that he must know a girl called Chilambi since he was often reciting the famous quatrain of Avveiyar's:

> The best of rivers is Kaveri, the best of rulers Chola,
> Elect of lands is Cholamandalam,
> The best of anklets are the gold anklets
> On the lotus feet of the damsel Chilambi of Ambel.

which sounded grand in Tamil with its intricate alliterations.

Sometimes cousin Rajah ragged us about girls. "Who will you marry when you grow up, Nalini or Sakuntala or Savitri?" Sometimes I would shout "Savitri" and sometimes "Sakuntala," and it was all great fun. On our way back home with the great palmyrah leaves rustling and the cicadas booming in the dark of the palm groves he would stop at one of the boutiques lit up with a naked carbide flame (atop a metal nozzle attached to rubber tubing), or a petromax lamp, and buy us lentil-doughnuts on a string, and lemonade in old fashioned bottles sealed with a glass ball which he cleverly opened with his thumb. The ball went down with a "phoosh" and a vitreous clatter, and the fizz bubbled up.

Though going out on 'shoots' and bathing at Keeri Malai were prominent features too when we holidayed at Uncle Ratna's, it was his pomegranates and his story-telling (which went on for days on end) that we liked best. Uncle Ratna's pomegranate trees were famous throughout the village.

Although I was barely ten when he died, and after all these years, I can still ~~mmmk~~ see the look of pleasure on Uncle Ratna's face as

the servant girl brought bowls of pomegranate seeds for us. Sitting on a stone sedile, on a tiger skin, under the porch, his kindly, unwrinkled face would light up. Then he would munch happily like Lucmi the cow, as he told us tales from Walter Scott, with of course many embellishments of his own: "And then the Black Knight rode up biting the reins between his teeth. 'Ho, Ivanhoe, Ho! Ivanhoe,' he shouted. Rebecca gazed down from the great height with her black hair streaming down behind her like a cloud of black bees etc. etc." He would often interrupt the narrative to exclaim, "This pomegranate is excellent!" But it was when he ate the fruit of his favourite Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well that he launched forth into superlatives. "Nothing in all Atchuvely to beat Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well!" he would tell us.

Uncle Ratna did not eat the pomegranate in its jacket, scooping the seeds out with a spoon as Englishmen do. That is wrong he told us. The seeds which look like Ceylon rubies are covered with turpentine-tasting integuments, which ruin their delicate flavour. They must be carefully removed. Nor do you swallow the seeds as most people do. The trick as Uncle Ratna taught us is to take a large spoonful of the seeds, and give them a bite or two to extract the juice, as you do with an oyster. A vintage pomegranate freshly picked when it has ripened on the tree, tastes like champagne, with the faintest trace of lemon. I cannot remember pomegranates that tasted as good anywhere outside Atchuvely, though I have often paid as much as five shillings for a fruit at Shearn's in London.

As is usual with all great men of the village in our island, Uncle Ratna was as much feared, as respected. Autocratic, stubborn, haughty and difficult to please, he was the Moopu of the Church or Chief Layman, as well as Head of the Village Tribunal which settled

disputes. When grandfather died he considered himself his rightful successor in Atchuvely as his first cousin. He was the first gentleman of Atchuvely. No one could contest this fact since none of grandfather's children lived there.

When grandfather was aliver there was of course no doubt who was the head of the village. People disappeared into their houses when he walked down the main street as a mark of respect. When we children walked down the village roads and lanes the lower castes genuflected, which surprised our city eyes, and tied the shawls hanging round their necks or shoulders round their waists before they talked to us, since it was considered disrespectful to be so gaily garbed in front of his grandchildren. But when he died Uncle Ratna thought he was entitled to all grandfather's special prerogatives, which assumption on the other hand was hotly contested by Uncle Aru.

In Uncle Aru's opinion, since he was the village Udayar or Representative of Law and Order (he considered this to be a higher position than Chief Layman of the Church or Head of the Village Tribunal) it was he who was now the first gentleman of the village deserving the special privileges. So both Uncle Ratna and Uncle Aru wanted to be the person to introduce all the others to a visiting dignitary like the Chief Magistrate, or Member of the Legislative Council, though there had been no disputes of this sort in grandfather's time. Now Uncle Ratna assumed a traditional courtesy and privilege that had been reserved for my grandfather and his father before him. He requested all bands in processions, whether for funerals, or weddings, to stop the noise a hundred yards from his house. Then Uncle Aru

issued the same order. When he went on to appropriate another of my late grandfather's privileges, asking all naga-sinnam orchestras (two Indian clarinets, a drone, and mridangam or many-voiced drum) to pay their first call at his house on New Year's Day, Uncle Ratna's rage, as they put it in Tamil 'lifted the roof.' He broke off relations with Uncle Aru's family for several weeks.

If it had ~~been~~ not been for Uncle Aur's subsequent thoughtfulness in sending him a leg of wild boar from his next "shoot", as he usually did, the rift would probably never have been mended.

Our two uncles quarrelled over privileges in this manner (though they were both kindly men whom we loved and who spoiled us as children) and the repercussions were felt in every thatched cottage and red-tiled house in Atchuvely. In our primly orthodox village men had guarded their privileges very jealously for generations. It was the dhobies or laundrymen, for instace, who supplied the white cloth to put on the dust of roads for wedding or funeral processions. If the local draper had dared to do this he may have been beaten up or even done away with in a surge of popular feeling. It was a certain sub-caste of the untouchables who had the right to sing and blow into the terra-cotta pots they carried in wedding processions. The women stopped the processions every few yards and would not go on until silver coins had been dropped into their pots. The profession of goldsmith belonged to a special caste. The tapping of palmyrah and coconut trees for toddy to another. There was a strict order of precedence in most matters - - - for instance two families in the village, through long tradition and usage thought it their privilege to sing first at social gatherings, first the one and then the other, whoever else was present. One of the lowest branches among the untouchables

approval when the cooks had given theirs. The usual morning chatter rose and fell as the fish changed hands leisurely in the bright morning light.

"The Goldsmith tells me Miss Sundari has been proposed to Aru aiyyah's son," the fisherwoman suddenly asked my aunt, hooking a lull in the conversation. She was speaking of our cousin Rajah and I listened attentively.

Sundari, sixteen years old, was Uncle Ratna's daughter. Within earshot in the salai or building in which visitors were received, she lowered her eyes modestly. This was perhaps the hundreth time that she had heard of a new proposal for her. The first couldhave been when she was three or even one, since such things are arranged by one's parents when one is still young.

My aunt was silent.

"He is very handsome, and I hear ver good at his studies," she continued, speaking to Sundari in the coaxing voice one used when taling of marriage to young girls.

Sundari giggled nervously, and adjusted her saree with a clatter of bangles.

"The astrologer is casting their horoscopes," my aunt admitted. "It will all depend on whether their horoscopes agree."

"I hear you are giving 100,000 for dowry! He is well worth it. May end up as a Government Agent," the fisherwoman continued, still pinning a sly look on Sundari. My aunt did not reply.

"That great-uncle of his drinks too much," the fisherwoman went on. A bottle a day and two bottles on Sundays. You'd better keep the man you marry off the bottle Sundari!" she teased her. And on that innuendo she glided away with the basket on her head, a most graceful figure.

The village goldsmith, everyone agreed had done his job well. An humourist and gossip, and general live-wire, he was the traditional marriage broker to the propertied class of our village. The fisherwomen had heard it from the great man himself, who had been loud in his self-praise. His rhetoric and high-flown phrasing was really remarkable.

A small, fair-complexioned man with a vermilion spot (potta) on his forehead, there was no doubt that he was vain and boastful. But it must be said in all fairness that he deserved his fame. Famous for his rhetoric and powers of persuation even outside Atchuvely, he had been known to carry out commissions for people in far away Trincomalee and Colombo. The people of our village had prospered in their callings all over the island so that his contacts were really island-wide.

He carried a wad of photographs of the eligible young girls and men on his trips round the island with his designs for jewellery done with pencil on fine tissue paper, and he had an open mind about his function. He was just as willing to marry off a plain girl for a large dowry, as a pretty one for a few thousand. He was as ready to over-sell a good-for-nothing to a pretty girl of social standing, as over-sell a handsome, intelligent young man to a pretty girl who had caught the chap's fancy. Mixing the two arts of marriage brokering and goldsmithing he had grown rich since he collected ten per cent on all dowries. He advertised his opulence in the gold bracelet he wore round his wrist, his diamond ring, and the white European jacket he wore with his verti or white nether garment on his trips to Colombo and Trincomalee.

He came in now for a lot of comment from the neighbours, the visitors and the servants. This was the high-point of his career. It was no mean feat they said to make Uncle Ratna promise his daughter to Uncle

Aru's son. He would no doubt be well paid for his trouble. The promised dowry was 100,000, which is a windfall for anybody, let alone a village goldsmith.

That evening after the last flight of crows had settled in the murunga and neem trees, and the bats had begun to hunt for bassia fruit, every house in Atchuvely must have been as full of the news as Uncle Ratna's was.

Earlier in the day Uncle Ratna had sent half a dozen fruit from Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well to Uncle Aru. To this day I have wondered this event had anything to do with what subsequently happened.

Uncle Ratna's house a mix patchwork of activity. As the wedding day drew near out-buildings of green and yellow palm-thatch were built, and gaily decorated with cycas, flamboyant, casuarina, frangipani, pale pink and white oleander, and orange coconut flowers. The ceilings were covered with snow-white cloth, and the floors with rich Indian carpets. A raised platform was erected under an ornate canopy, where on the wedding day the bridggroom would sit with his men friends in front of the traditional brass water-vessel, topped with betel-leaves and yellow lime fruit - - - symbols of fertility.

Uncle Ratna had ordered the koorai or wedding saree from Benares in India for 3,000 rupees (a hand-woven brocade piece of traditional bright vermilion) which was extravagant of him. In common with other Ceylonese parents he was willing to bankrupt himself for the wedding of hid daughter . . . in his case, his only daughter, which always called forth even worse extravagance in Ceylon. He had booked two bands of musicians from Tanjore, besides the local drummers who would be posted at the entrance to the estate. As each new guest arrived on the wedding day, the drummers would signal from the distance, the children

would rush out to light their packets of Chinese crackers, one of the bands inside the house start playing, and people let off their shot-guns - - - muzzle-loaders and everything else they'd got.

Day after day there was a flow of gifts into the house. It was a heterogenous mixture representing the produce of the countryside. The gifts of money, in white envelopes, would be handed in personally on the wedding day. But, in the meantime, it was exciting merely to sit and watch the endless caravan of tributes that were often carried on the shoulders of two men — bunches of bananas on a pole, jars of sesamum and sweet bassia oil, livestock and poultry, sacks of rice, bottles of arrack, boxes of cheroots, all kinds of vegetables like brinjal, jak and drumstick, and a profusion of tropical fruit like mango, rose-apple and papaya. The poorer people sent in a few coconuts to savour the wedding curries.

On the wedding eve, a man squatted for hours under a mango-tree, grinding a log of sandal-wood to paste for making the pottus or caste-marks on the forehead. It would be put into silver bowls and offered to all arriving guests on the morrow, after they had been perfumed with pani from silver sprinklers.

Out in the open, in themango grove, enormous iron cauldrons were placed on tripods of stones for cooking the rice and a dozen curries. Three hundred guests at least would come to the wedding lunch, besides the many low-caste workers who would be fed on the remains afterwards — for that was the unchanging custom at all feasts, the men first, waited on by the women, the women and servants next, and then the low-caste workers fed in the mango or tamarind grove, low-caste workers being not allowed anywhere near the house.

It was the wedding eve! The tempo of activity increased and a prize steer was slaughtered. The dhobies or laundrymen arrived with bales of white cloth to cover the dust of the roads next day for the procession to walk on. And/ then the two elephants, with mahouts, to carry the bride and bridegroom. Strolling players and musicians from outlying villages had camped near by. The atmosphere was electric. This evening before the wedding, the dowry would be fixed and given away to the bridegroom or his father according to tradition. The astrologer, the lawyer, the goldsmith and Uncle Aru would be along soon and then everything would be fixed. Cousin Rajah was still away in Colombo, so Uncle Aru would receive the dowry in his place.

We crowded round Uncle Ratna who was seated at a table in the courtyard. Thepomegranate seeds in the dish before him gleamed like as many fiery rubies. He had put on his scarlet and gold turban and looked more unwrinkled and moon faced than ever in his knee-length black sherwani coat that buttoned all the way up to his neck. In between chewing pomegranate, he helped himself to the bottle of arrack.

When the goldsmith arrived with the astrologer I stared in awe at them.

"Salaam, aiyyah," the goldsmith said.

"Sit down," Uncle Ratna said. "Where is that damned Aru? He is late."

"He will be along soon," the goldsmith replied.

Uncle Ratna drummed on the table with his fingers. He helped himself to more arrack. He did not offer the goldsmith or astrologer a drink, since it is not considered proper to offer the lower castes food or drink inside a high-caste house, though/ they were high enough in the caste-heirarchy to be asked to sit down. He looked very thoughtful. This day he was going to part with the greater portion

"I have decided to settle the rice-fields at Chunnakam on my daughter," Uncle Ratna told Uncle Aru.

Uncle Aru turned his piercing eyes in their eagle head on moon faced Uncle Ratna. He looked proud and magnificent. He seemed very self-confident and satisfied with himself. "How about the tobacco land behind the Tavern?" he asked blandly.

"I am giving you that also," Uncle Ratna said.

Uncle Aru pounded away at the betel-leaf mixture, wrapped in thought.

"That makes 25,000 rupees. Fifty thousand will be in cash," Uncle Ratna continued. "For the rest I am throwing in part of this property, together with the house next door. Come, I will show you the bounday line."

With that they rose and went in the direction of the well, followed by the members of the household who had crowded around.

Uncle Ratna halted by the well and pointed northwards to the mango tree that grew in the middle of the pomegranate orchard. "That will be the boundary," he said.

"Oh," said Uncle Aru and I could see his eyes linger a moment on Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well which grew beside it on the north side. Ithu enna? What is the use of the next door property without a well? I tell you what Cousin Ratna, draw the boundary through the diagonal of half the well. Let that be the boundary line. Let the northern half of the well belong to the house next door, so it won't be waterless!" He looked again at Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well.

Uncle Ratna's face clouded at this, and I could see him look anxiously at his favourite pomegranate tree. If half the well, that is the northern half were to be given as part of the dowry, the tree would definitely be on the wrong side. It would no longer be his.

We were all taken aback. The dowry-arranging had been a flop, as it sometimes happened, and the marriage was off.

The goldsmith wrung his hands his face distorted with disappointment, and then I saw him take out his little black notebook and cross out an entry. And at dinner later Uncle Ratna told us, "The devil! He wanted Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well!"

Cousin Sundari went about as if nothing had happened.

And so the wedding we had looked forward to didn't materialize, and they took away the out-buildings and all the decorations.

But before the week was out Uncle Ratna had written to his rubber planter cousin in Malaya and arranged a marriage with his son for Sundari. The youth arrived within two weeks and the marriage was celebrated with even greater pomp and ceremony, with fireworks, a brass band, and a hired electricity generator from Jaffna that spangled the house and tree tops with coloured bulbs. The grandeur of the proceedings was no doubt meant to impress Uncle Aru, who did not attend the wedding, with his own unimportance, though soon afterwards he resumed sedning Uncle Ratna legs of wild boar and venison and jungle fowl from his usual 'shoots'.

Cousin Rajah, who had fallen in love with Sundari during the marriage negotiations then became difficult, and refused to marry for several years until he met a Colombo girl with vast coconut estates at Puttalam, an ability to play tennis indifferently, and even drive a car which was considered a point in her favour. She was obviously one of those modern girls, and though she was apt to shock the village with her lipstick and short-sleeved blouses she was the delight of Uncle Aru's old age. He even built her a tennis court beside his house, though the lady who bore him several grandsons gave up all interest in the

game after her first son's birth.

Today when I think of Uncle Ratna, I think of that pomegranate tree by his well which was famous throughout Atchuvely for its fruit, and for that matter, still is. It was still flourishing by the well when I visited Atchuvely last year, though theman who planted it and tended it is now no more. Though he had many other pomegranate trees, it was that tree that Uncle Ratna loved best.

THE END

THE POMEGRANATE TREE

Some men have a special weakness, for which they will sacrifice everything--even the happiness of those who are most dear to them. The dice-crazy king in the "Mahabharata," for example, gambled away his wife, Draupadi. My Uncle Ratna had such a weakness for the fruit of the pomegranate tree that grew beside the well of his house, in the village of Atchuvely, in North Ceylon.

Sitting on a tiger skin on a stone seat under the porch and munching the seeds of a pomegranate from this tree, he would tell my brothers and me tales from Sir Walter Scott, with embellishments of his own: "And then the Black Knight rode up biting the reins between his teeth. 'Ho, Ivanhoe! Ho, Ivanhoe!' he shouted. Rebecca gazed down from the great height, with her black hair streaming down behing her like a cloud of black bees...This pomegranate is excellent. There is nothing in all Atchuvely to match Pomegranate-Tree-by-the-Well!"

Uncle Ratna said it was wrong to eat the pomegranate as Englishmen do, scooping the seeds out with a spoon. The turpentine-tasting integuments ruined the delicate flavor and must be carefully removed. And you must not swallow the seeds. Instead, you must take a large spoonful of them and, biting once or twice, extract the juice, as you do with an oyster, then spit out the seeds. A fresh pomegranate that has ripened on the tree tastes like champagne, with the faintest trace of lemon. I cannot remember pomegranates outside Atchuvely that tasted as good.

During the rainy season, my five brothers and I lived with our parents in Colombo City and went to school there, The long summer vacation we spent in Atchuvely, with my paternal grandfather while he lived, and then with Uncle Ratna, who was my father's cousin once removed, or with Uncle Aru, who was a cousin of my mother's. According to the Ceylonese laws of kinship, they were uncles to my brothers and me. It is customary in Ceylon for uncles to spoil their nephews, and so we looked forward to our visits to Atchuvely.

Uncle Aru was small and thin and ascetic-looking and birdlike, with nervous gestures and a finely carved eagle head, topped with white hair. He was a stickler for detail, and before he sent us off, by car or horse carriage, to Keeri Malai (a little promontory by the sea, which was both a place of pilgrimage and a spa) for a swim in the fresh-water tank, and lunch in a Brahmin restaurant, he himself saw to it that there was a towel for everybody and mats for our afternoon siesta, and then he would hand his son, our cousin Rajah, the exact amount of money we would need for the day's outing. On those evenings when nothing in particular had been planned, he would tell Rajah to take us hunting for pigeon and snipe.

My cousin Rajah was tall and handsome and fond of quoting poetry--especially quatrains from the poetess Avvaiyar, who lived in the first century A. D. Today he is a government agent, wholly occupied with forms and procedures, but I always remember him as a poet, with his face lifted to the sky. The hunting was part of the poetry of the open air, the palmyra groves, the rice fields, and the birds. Sometimes Rajah teased us about girls. "Who will you marry when you grow up? Nalini, or Sakuntala, or Savitri?" he would ask me. Sometimes I would shout "Savitri!" and sometimes "Sakuntala!" and it was all great fun. On our way back

around their waists, since it was considered disrespectful to be so gaily garbed in front of his grandchildren.

Both Uncle Ratna and Uncle Aru wanted to be the person to introduce all the other inhabitants to visiting dignitaries, as my grandfather and his father before him had been. When Uncle Ratna announced that all bands in processions, whether for funerals or weddings, were to stop playing a hundred yards from his house, Uncle Aru immediately issued the same order. When Uncle Aru went on to appropriate another of Grandfather's privileges, asking all nagasinnam orchestras (two Indian clarinets, a drone, and a mridangam, or many-voiced drum) to pay their first call on New Year's Day at his house, Uncle Ratna, in a rage, broke off relations with Uncle Aru and his family for several weeks. Uncle Aru thoughtfully sent him a leg of wild boar, as he often did after a shoot, and the rift was mended.

When our two uncles quarrelled over privileges in this manner, the repercussions were felt in every thatched cottage and red-tiled house in Atchuvely. The village was rigidly orthodox, and men had guarded their privileges very jealously for generations. The laundrymen supplied the white cloth to put on the dusty roads for wedding or funeral processions; if the local draper had dared to do this, he might have been beaten up, or even killed, in a surge of popular feeling. And only the women of a certain subcaste of the untouchables had the right to sing and carry terracotta pots in wedding processions; they blew into the pots, making a very deep, resonant sound, and every few yards the women stopped the procession and would not go on until silver coins had been dropped into their pots. The profession of goldsmith belonged to a special caste, the tapping of palmyra and coconut trees for toddy to another. There was a strict order of precedence in most matters; for instance, two

families in the village, through long tradition, thought it was their privilege to sing first at social gatherings, one and then the other, no matter who else was present. One of the lowest branches of the untouchables had the right to claim the remnants of all wedding and funeral feasts. If cattle died, the nallavan, a subcaste, had a right to the carcasses. Only certain of the higher castes had the right to wear sandals or shoes. All these unwritten laws were strictly observed, and it was against this convention-ridden background, rather than from innate contentiousness, that Uncle Ratna and Uncle Aru, who were both kindly, lovable men, quarrelled over privileges. Their sense of tradition and orthodoxy was strong, and which family was going to take precedence over the other was a matter that had to be settled for the future.

At the same time, there was talk of a permanent union of the two rival families. Although I was only eight the summer this talk circulated, I knew, like everyone else, of the tension that existed between them. I was standing in the courtyard of Uncle Ratna's house one day when the fishwife arrived with her palm-leaf basket. She placed the basket on the ground and tipped it, and, as usual, fish of all shapes and sizes came tumbling out of it--tuna and swordfish, jumbo shrimps, lobster, crab, cuttlefish, whitebait, sprats. The sea sand of nearby Valalai or Point Pedro still clung to them like diamond chips. The neighbors hurried over to join my aunt and her two cooks. The cooks had the last word in the buying of fish, but did their haggling in the presence of my aunt, who nodded her approval when the cooks had given theirs. The chatter rose and fell as the fish changed hands in the bright morning light.

"The goldsmith tells me Miss Sundari had been proposed to Aru aiyyah's son," the fishwife suddenly said to my aunt during a lull in the conversation. She was speaking of our cousin Rajah, and I pricked up my ears. Uncle Ratna had no sons, and Sundari was his only daughter. Within earshot in the salai, the open pavilion in which visitors were received, Sundari lowered her eyes modestly. She was sixteen years old. This was perhaps the hundredth time that she had heard of a new proposal for her. The first could have been when she was three years old, or even one.

My aunt was silent.

"He is very handsome," the fishwife continued, turning to Sundari and speaking in the coaxing voice one used when talking of marriage to young girls. "And, I hear, very good at his studies."

Sundari giggled nervously, and adjusted her sari with a clatter of bangles.

"The astrologer is casting their horoscopes," my aunt admitted. "It will all depend on whether their horoscopes agree."

"I hear you are giving a hundred thousand rupees for dowry! He is well worth it. He may end up as a government agent," the fishwife continued, with a sly look at Sundari.

Again my aunt did not reply, and the fishwife put her basket on her head and glided away.

The village goldsmith was the traditional marriage broker of the propertied class. The goldsmith who was trying to arrange a marriage between Rajah and Sundari was a small, fair-complexioned man with a vermillion spot on his forehead, and he was vain and boastful. His

As the wedding day drew near, Uncle Ratna's household seethed with activity. Pavilions were built of green-and-yellow palm thatch and would be gaily decorated with flowers--cycas, flamboyant, casuarina, frangipani, pale-pink and white oleander, and orange coconut flowers. The ceilings would be covered with white cloth, and the floors with Indian carpets. On a raised platform under an ornate canopy, the bridegroom would sit, with his men friends, in front of the traditional brass water vessel, which would have betel leaves and flowers and yellow lime fruit, symbols of fertility, arranged on it.

Uncle Ratna had ordered the wedding sari from Benares. It was a handwoven brocade piece of traditional bright vermillion, and it cost three thousand rupees--about nine hundred and fifty dollars in those days. Besides the five local drummers, who would be posted at the entrance to the estate, he had booked two bands of musicians from Tanjore to play indoors. As each new guest arrived on the day of the wedding, the drummers would signal from the distance, the children would rush out lighting packets of Chinese firecrakers, one of the bands inside the house would start playing, and people would let off their shotguns, muzzle-loaders, and every other kind of firearm.

Day after day, there was a steady flow of gifts into the house--bunches of bananas hanging from a pole carried on the shoulders of two men, jars of sesamum and sweet bassia oil, livestock and poultry, sacks of rice, bottles of arrack, boxes of cheroots, such vegetables as brinjal, jack, and drumstick, and a profusion of tropical fruits, such as mangoes, rose apples and papayas. The poorer people sent a few cocomuts to be used for savoring the wedding curries.

On the day before the wedding, a man squatted for hours under a mango tree grinding a log of sandalwood to paste for making the pottus, or caste marks, for the forehead. The paste would be put into silver bowls and offered to all arriving guests after they had been perfumed with pani from silver sprinklers. Out in the open, in the mango grove, enormous iron caldrons for cooking the rice and the curries were being placed on tripods of stones. Three hundred guests, at least, would come to the wedding lunch, besides the many low-caste workers, who would be fed on the remains afterward--for that was the unchanging custom at all feasts. The men ate first, waited on by the women; the women and servants ate next; and then the low-caste workers were fed in the mango or tamarind grove, lowcaste workers not being allowed inside the house.

A prize steer was slaughtered. The pavilions were all decorated. The laundrymen arrived with bales of white cloth for the procession to walk on. And then the two elephants arrived, with mahouts, to carry the bride and bridegroom to church and back. Strolling players and musicians from outlying villages were setting up camps nearby. The astrologer, the lawyer, the goldsmith, and Uncle Aru were expected toward the end of the afternoon, and then the amount of the dowry would be fixed.

My five brothers and I crowded around Uncle Ratna, who was seated at a table in the courtyard with a dish of pomegranate seeds and a bottle of arrack in front of him. He had put on a scarlet-and-gold turban, and knee-length black coat that buttoned all the way up to his neck. From time to time, he chewed pomegranate seeds or drank arrack.

The goldsmith arrived, with the astrologer. "Sit down," Uncle Ratna said. "Where is that damned Aru? He is late."

"He will be along soon," the goldsmith replied.

Uncle Ratna drummed on the table with his fingers. He helped himself to more arrack. He did not offer the goldsmith or the astrologer a drink; they were high enough in the caste hierarchy to sit down but not to take food or drink. Uncle Ratna looked very thoughtful. This day, he was going to part with the greater portion of his wealth. All he would keep for himself would be the house he lived in and a bit of agricultural land to bring him a small income. The occasion would not have been so sobering for him if he had had sons to bring in dowries.

Uncle Aru now arrived, looking very lean and distinguished, with his white hair tied into a small knot at the back, and gold earrings hanging from his exquisitely molded ears. He, too, was wearing a black knee-length coat.

"Let's get through this quickly," Uncle Ratna said.

"Chari, chari (All right, all right)," Uncle Aru said, sitting down at the table and producing a silver mortar and pestle. He put some betel-leaf mixture into the mortar, and pounded away at it, getting it ready to chew.

"The astrologer says the omens are good. The horoscopes agree," Uncle Ratna whispered. I could feel my heart beating. The word "omens" conjured up things mysterious and fearful.

"So I hear," Uncle Aru replied, pounding.

I could see Sundari in the visitor' building, surrounded by the women-folk and as excited as anyone else, though she managed to affect the coy look that was proper to the occasion.

The lawyer came into the courtyard then, with a big bundle of land deeds, which Uncle Ratna took from him.

"I have decided to settle the rice fields at Chunnakam on my daughter," Uncle Ratna told Uncle Aru.

"How about the tobacco land behind the tavern?" Uncle Aru asked.

"I am giving her that also," Uncle Ratna said.

Uncle Aru pounded away at the betel-leaf mixture.

"The two of them are valued at twenty-five thousand rupees," Uncle Ratna continued. "Fifty thousand will be in cash. For the rest, I am throwing in part of this property, together with the house next door. Come, I will show you the boundary line."

With that, they rose and went in the direction of the well. My brothers and I followed, and so did the members of the household, who crowded around. Uncle Ratna halted by the well and pointed beyond it to the mango tree that grew in the middle of the pomegranate orchard. "That will be the boundary," he said.

"Oh," said Uncle Aru. "What good is the next-door property without a well? I tell you what, Cousin Ratna--draw the boundary through the center of the well. Let that be the boundary line. Then the house next door won't be without water."

Uncle Ratna's face clouded. He looked anxiously at his favorite pomegranate tree. If half the well was given as part of the dowry, the tree would no longer be his.

"You <u>can</u> have the use of the well," he said. "But let the boundary remain at that mango tree!"

The recruit immediately preceding me turns to give me a happy smile, and both of us spontaneously salute. We feel suddenly rich. And not because of bigger pay envelopes to come. We've got ourselves three thousand mates. We've come through. We're Federation men. We can wear the little blue button with the clasped hands on it. . . .

My palms tingle. How much more is it than the simple design of a badge!

Australia

Vivian Smith

FOR MY DAUGHTER

MADE from nothing: bud and rose,
kisses, water, mystery;
you who grew inside our need
run, in your discovery,

out of the garden's folded light,
out of the green, the fountain's spray,
past the shrubs, the dew-lit ferns,
out to the noise, the street, the day:

and stand, in your astonishment,
beneath the hanging heavy limes
(O my child, O my darling daughter,
summer was full of wars and crimes)

to see the foal, the clown, the doll,
the circus and procession band
march up the street and march away . . .
And so you turn and take my hand.

RAMAN

by

Tambimuttu

Ceylon

~~THE MAN WITH THE EVIL EYE~~

THE ~~bountiful~~ rich paddy crop, which should have been ready for reaping in February, was rotting in the fields. The storms and floods of the north-east monsoon, particularly severe that year, had laid it waste. The farmers of Atchuvely were troubled, and the village was full of rumours.

"Raman said he thought the Monmari * (~~August-February~~) crop should be good this year—and look what has happened!" I heard Farmer Chellar tell the others. Being prosperous, he was ~~a sort of~~ village elder among them, and in fact older than most. His red eyes, flushed with toddy, were dangerous over ~~his fillet of fish cheeks~~. Even his ~~capacious~~ belly, attached to fat legs like a child's, usually so comfortable-seeming in its nakedness, looked dangerous scored with vigorous black hair.

The other farmers who had gathered under the tamarind-tree by the junction, their usual meeting place in the evenings, talked among themselves excitedly. The seller of sweet-meats under the tree was the only person who seemed unaffected, since trade was as usual.

"My child had the measles last year, and it was all due to ~~that~~ the young Farmer Kaspar shouted, as village people shout when they are talking, holding on with ~~hands~~ to his white shawl which hung toga-wise across his shoulder, revealing patches of nut-brown skin. He was a simple and straightforward man and much liked in the village. "Raman is dangerous," he said. "We ~~shall~~ have to make him leave. The place is not healthy with him here."

"Don't be crazy! He has as much right to live in Atchuvely as we have!" shouted the angry voice of Farmer Nesan, although he was not angry. When village voices ~~were~~ got rhetorical they ~~always~~ sounded angry to me.

* August – February

"Raman is coming. I'm going home," said Farmer Chellar, shuffling his sandals along the limestone road. He spat out some red betel-chew, explosively.

When Raman, who was with the Evil Eye, arrived the farmers exchanged quick, veiled glances as they usually did when Raman praised something, or looked approvingly at anything that had caught his fancy. The poor man suffered from the Evil Tongue, as well. If he praised a beautiful child it was bound to sicken, or if he looked approvingly at a crop it was bound to wither.

Whereas in the other villages the one with the Evil Eye was a woman (and every village had one), our village had been cursed with a male whose influence was correspondingly more powerful. So every farmer had put up a pole in the middle of his field and balanced a pot with white lime marks on top to counteract it. Since the betel vines were especially susceptible, being so feminine and delicate, those farmers who could lay their hands on one for a charm had hung an ox's skull nearby.

"Aepuddi chukkam?" (Greetings; how's your health?) Farmer Nesan asked Raman loudly. He was being friendly towards Raman, who he realized was in a fix, although the man did not know it.

The crows in the tamarind tree cawed loudly and flew away as Farmer Kaspar threw a stone at them.

"What's one to do? All our crops are ruined," Raman replied.

"Whose fault is it?" shouted one of the farmers. Raman looked at him innocently.

At normal times the village folk were too kindly ever to let Raman know what he was afflicted with, but the unprecedented disaster was proving too much for them.

"Oh, ask the crows," Raman said.

Farmer Kaspar picked up another stone and threw it at the milk-hedge, which bled.

Although the farmers usually spent a long time chatting under the tamarind tree every evening, after their visit to the tavern, they began to disperse early today.

Nesan stayed on with Raman chatting in a friendly manner, and I returned homeward.

When I reached Stone House, where my elder brother Rutnam and I were staying with grandfather, I asked him about Raman's evil eye.

"It's a lot of nonsense," grandfather told me. "They paint eyes on the houses to keep the evil eye away in Italy. Here they paint eyes on pots."

He was being wise and tolerant. He was a famous editor and poet, besides being a philanthropist, and what he said was better than the law itself in Atchuvely. So I didn't worry much about Raman.

Besides, I remembered that Raman believed in the Evil Eye. If he was afraid of it, how could he have it himself?

I remembered the evening three years back when my brother Rutnam and I were walking down the road where Raman lived. Raman was sitting on the nicely carved oblong stone opposite his house where he often sat in the evening, chewing his betel and tobacco and drinking in the air that had been cooled by his wife sprinkling water on the heated road and compound. We averted our eyes and hurried on. But he called out our names, so we had to stop.

"Children, how is Grandfather of Stone House?" he asked, fixing us with his eyes which were too close to each other in a narrow face which was otherwise quite handsome. They looked somewhat unnatural and I think may have been the chief cause of the villagers' superstition.

"He is well," Rutnam answered politely.

"He is having trouble with the Ford. A man from Jaffna is coming to have a look at it," I added.

"Oh, is he?" Raman asked. "It is pretty old, isn't it? I suppose he is using the Dodge now?"

"No." I replied. "He drove to Jaffna in his horse carriage this morning. He told us that never gave him any trouble."

Farmer Raman laughed, stretching his thin lips like india-rubber bands, between his well-shaped long nose and his jutting jaw, which looked slightly out of place on so narrow a face. "He won't give up his horses. He is the old type of gentleman. How old are you now?" he asked.

"Five," I replied timidly.

"Come into the house," he said. "I will give you children some of my special ottu (grafted) mangoes."

I tugged at my brother's shirt-sleeve to warn him I would like to go on. But he said, "Oh! that is nice of you, Raman," and started across the road with him; so I followed helplessly.

We walked through his gate set in greying walls, and sat on a bench in a courtyard while he shouted to his wife to slice some ottu mangoes. I looked past his well on the left to his kitchen garden. In the middle of it stood a pole with an overturned clay pot painted with white lime marks.

I was surprised to see such an object in his house.

"Why do you have that?" I asked Farmer Raman.

"Don't you know?" he asked in a surprised voice. "That is to keep the evil eye away."

Eating the mangoes I had thought then if Raman is afraid of the evil eye he surely can't have it himself.

When Rutnam and I woke up next morning, the ayah gave us our morning baths, and painted the black pottus or beauty-spots on the forehead with more than usual care. They were meant to avert the evil eye and all children were made to wear it whether they were Hindu or Christian.

"Now remember to slip back into the house if you see Raman," she warned. The mothers and ayahs ordered the children inside the house if Raman came up the road. But he never seemed to notice anything unusual.

"Nonsense," I replied. "The crops failing have nothing to do with Raman."

However, the childhood impression persisted in the back of my mind that the evil tongue and the evil eye could bring harm. I had seen visitors refraining from praising children in case they had the evil eye unwittingly; and when strangers admired a child, the womenfolk had looked troubled. I had watched "lime cutting", ceremonies in which the exorcist sliced a hundred limes on the forehead of a person cursed with the evil eye, to drive it away with special incantations and the sprinkling of virgin water from a new spring dug secretly at night. All these things had left an impression on my unreasoning mind. So in spite of my retort to the ayah I felt vaguely troubled that morning.

More news of impending trouble arrived at Stone House when Farmer Nesan arrived around ten o'clock to speak with grandfather. It was not unusual for the farmers to bring their problems and their disputes to him.

"Well, Nesan, what is the trouble now?" asked grandfather looking up from the proof he was correcting. Innumerable proofs littered the floor and the printing presses rumbled in the adjoining outbuilding.

"It's about Raman," Nesan replied. "Chellar and Kaspar have persuaded the washer-man not to take in Raman's laundry. Raman beat the man up. And now the oil-man won't call at Raman's house since the farmers have threatened him with violence. What are we going to do?"

"Does Raman know what it's all about?" asked grandfather.

"He thinks someone is trying to harm him."

"Tell Chellar and Kaspar I would like to see them," said grandfather.

Chellar and Kaspar called after their lunch just as grandfather was thinking of his siesta. They looked embarrassed, hung their heads down and twiddled their fingers. They sat down on the floor in front of grandfather.

"Look here Chellar and Kaspar," grandfather said, "Raman has as much right to farm in Atchuvely as you have. He was born here and so was his father. Now be good men and don't create any trouble for him."

"We have lost our crops, sir, and that is a serious matter. As long as he is here we will have ill luck. What are we to do?"

"Put yourself in his place. What would you have done if the village thought the same about you both?"

Chellar and Kaspar didn't say anything but hung their heads; they murmured a sheepish poetu-vaaraan (*I will go and return*) and shuffled out clutching their shawls.

They did not seem convinced, but it seemed unlikely that they would go against grandfather's request.

I was impatient for the evening so that I could go to the Junction and hear what the farmers were saying.

Before the sun touched the horizon Rutnam and I set out for the Junction. The mangoes and neems rustled pleasantly and we stopped under the jujube tree to pick up some fruit. The homing

crows squawked across the sky. The white limestone road glowed a soft pink in the air that had suddenly become cool.

When we neared the Junction we found that a large crowd had assembled. They were all excited and the vendor of sweetmeats under the tamarind tree was doing a brisk trade serving out portions of the roast gram, lentils, doughnuts with shrimps, boiled manioc and curry relish and other delicacies spread out on the trestle lit with a naked carbide flame.

Chellar and Kaspar eyed us as if we were spies. We felt bad about it but we couldn't help our itching curiosity. Nesan nodded to us. "This is a bad affair," he said.

"It is a bad affair," another added. "It is for the good of the village."

"You are all fools," growled Nesan who seemed to have thought it out deeply in the toddy tavern.

When Raman arrived, looking agitated, a silence fell on everybody. He went straight up to Chellar and Kaspar and asked in a furious voice, "What do you mean by the things you told the washerman and the oilmonger?"

"What do you mean?" asked Kaspar drunkenly. He picked up a stone and threw it at the milk-hedge. He hit it accurately and it bled again.

"Look Raman, we all like you, but it is time you left the village," said Chellar ingratiatingly, looking rather ridiculous and fat, with a hanging bimbla-fruit lower lip that showed his teeth.

"What do you mean?" shouted Raman as if he had lost all control of himself. His face was distorted and his fingers bunched. In another minute he would have knocked Chellar down.

"We can't help it, Raman, it's your evil eye that's the matter," replied Chellar almost sorrowfully, regarding him gravely with his red ones.

All the rage seemed to drain from Raman's face when he heard Chellar's words. He looked shocked and bewildered. He stared unbelievingly at Chellar and Kaspar and round at the crowd.

Then he turned on his heels and walked slowly away, like a man in a daze, and the crowd gazed at him with pity.

Farmer Kaspar picked up another stone and hurled it at the tamarind, from which the crows darted squawking angrily.

Rutnam and I felt sorry for Raman. The villagers had behaved atrociously to him.

We saw nothing of him for several days. Raman did not come to the Junction any more. He was not to be seen in his field or outside his house sitting on the carved stone, although the road in front of it had been sprinkled with water as usual. No one mentioned his name.

And then one morning he came to see us. His bullock cart stood outside laden with his belongings, with his wife sitting on the front plank, a patient, still figure. He told us he had come to wish us good-bye. He was going away to Mannar, a hundred miles away, to settle down with a cousin. He had rented out his farm to Nesan.

Grandfather stared at him in a strange way, and then he nodded his head. Even his wisdom could see no other way out for Raman.

Raman then went to his cart, beat the bulls with the stick, and bit their tails with his teeth, so that they raced.

SPEAKING OF GREAT-GRANDFATHER

Great-grandfather was, I suppose, the most active man in the household of our Grandfather-with-the-Beard, in Atchuvely village, North Ceylon. My scholarly grandfather was impractical, so it was great-grandfather, who attended to the details of the estate, even when he was ninety-five years old. He marketed the coconut, the rice, the mango and tobacco crops. It was a treat to watch great-grandfather with the buyers, who were mostly a rough lot. Four or five of them (looking alike) would turn up as if on a casual visit, and talk about irrelevant things -- anything but the job on hand. He would peer at them steadily from his faded brown eyes, and utter a "Huh", which committed him neither one way nor the other. Then, after a little thought, he added: "You want the mango crop?" "Yes, sir," they would reply, wriggling with pretended shyness, as if the thought had never entered their heads. Great-grandfather would then spring down from his bed, with all the energy of a young man, his legs long and shapely, under the white verti, or flowing nether garment. From the peg, He took down the gold-bordered shawl, from the peg, which he flung over his right shoulder. He picked up removed from the rack the silver-knobbed cane, my mother had brought for him from Malacca, and erect, strode off to the mango groves, with my five brothers and me, and a servants, and any others who cared to come along, streaming behind him. He would halted under each ancient, knarled tree to appraise the year's crop with dead certainty. As the buyers (who knew the pedigree and flavor -strains of each tree from long association with them) made their bid, great-grandfather merely grunted "Hm", before passing on to the next one. If the bid was ridiculous, he said nothing, but stared straight at the man, who hastily raised his bid. When the grand total was reached, great-grandfather merely raised it, and it was final then. The men

always bought. ~~They spent a few days on the~~ orahard plucking the fruit in an ingenious fashion. A long pole ended in a barb, with a basket underneath. The fruit was plucked with the barb and it fell into the coconut-floss lined basket underneath. If a mango bruises, it rots before it ripens. Whether the sale was of mango, coconut, rice or tobacco, ~~great-grandfather~~/he gave my brothers and me a rake-off on the deal, for our interest in the matter; and then we made off to the shops at the kittangi, or the Junction, which was the focal point of Atchuvely, for a spree of spending. ~~great-grandfather~~/He was always generous with his money. When my uncle was a child, and great-grandfather/he was the renter of the toddy and arrack taverns, in our parts, he never banked the loose change, we were told, but brought it home bundled in his shawl/~~in a large bundle~~ and flung the coins/~~it~~ on his bed, for my uncle to play with, and then take to his mother. On our spending sprees at the Junction, great-grandfather sometimes accompanied us, and then, we felt important. People were attentive/~~deferential~~ when he was around.

One of the earliest memories I have of great-grandfather is that he took my elder brother Rutnam and me to our first Yakkun Nettuma (Devil Dance). My mother, who was his grand-daughter, was against it/~~it~~ at first, but his ideas prevailed. He said it was important for members of his family to be familiar with such things.

One of the earliest memories I have of great-grandfather is that he took my elder brother, Rutnam, and me, to our first Yakkun Nettuma (Devil Dance). It was when we were at the small town of Kelaniya, near Colombo, where we were visiting relatives, prior to a wedding in the family. My mother, who was his grand-daughter, was against it at first, but his ~~ideas~~/wishes prevailed; ~~He~~/he said it was important for members of his family to be familiar with such things. I was three and a half years old at the time, and I remember that I wore a ~~blue~~/black velvet suit with innumerable

]On our way home, with the drums still throbbing in our ears, Rutnam and I felt apprehensive, since When the routing begins, Mahasona is so furious, ~~furious angry~~, that he rampages around wreaking vengeance on anyone he meets. We looked apprehensively at the patches of inky blackness under the banyans and bread-fruit trees. "Do you think the routing has begun?" Rutnam whispered. "I don't know," I replied. "Appa (great-grandfather)," I enquired timidly, "Has the routing begun?" "Don't worry," ~~he said, waving his stick~~. "The Pootham (Demon) brandishing his stick, won't touch us." He reassured us, but we guessed he was just as anxious as we were ~~as ourselves~~ to get home!

When we called at the Devil Dance next day, the dancer still danced and threw resin on his torch, to bring Mahasona out, with light, from the darkest corners where he may hide; and the Possessed One still sat on her specially constructed platform of arecanut wood, but she seemed cured. It left a powerful impression on my brother Rutnam and me. It was the dramatisation of the magical world, which, ever since I can remember, great-grandfather -- who was our authority on Devils, Apparitions, and Magic -- had made real for us. After the Dance, we made him draw his cabalistic figure on the ground, and drive a piece of iron into its middle, to keep Mahasona at bay. He knew all its secrets, having been tutored by our village magician.

buttons, my parents had bought for me in Singapore, and of which I was very proud.... We arrived, after dinner, at a neighbour's house, where as ~~xxxxWexarrivedxxafterxdinnerxxatxxneighbourxhousexxwh~~ grandfather explained, a woman of the household had been possessed by the devil. She had the obvious signs -- she dishevelled her hair, and had fits. The exorcising by the Devil Dancer was to go on all night, to noon next day. To the acoompaniment of an assistant, he whirled intricately with a clash of anklet bells, and threw resin on a torch he held, which punctuated the dance with blinding flashes. He wore, over his face, one of the lesser Mahasona (Devil) masks, which he replaced with more and more fearsome masks, as the dance proceeded. The dancing and chanting rose in intensity, as the Dancer wooed Mahasona out, with false flattery, to make him come out and make himself comfortable in the assembled company. At midnight, his terrible routing would begin. But we left long before that. When we called next day, ~~the Possessed One still sat on her platform of arecanut wood, but she seemed cured. The dancer still danced and threw resin on his blazing torch.~~ to bring Mahasona out, with light, from the darkest corners where he may hide; The dancer still danced and threw resin on his torch, and the Possessed One still sat on her platform of arecanut wood, but she seemed cured. ~~The ceremonies did not end till noon, when the sun reached its zenith. The Devil Dance~~ St left a powerful impression on my brother Rutnam and me. It was the dramatisation of the magical world, which, ever since — who was our authority on Devils, Apparitions, and Magic — I can remember, great-grandfather had made real for us. ~~He was our authority on Devils, Apparitions, and Magic.~~ After the Devil Dance, We made him draw his cabalistic figure on the ground, and drive a piece of iron into its middle, to keep Mahasona at bay. ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ He knew all its secrets, having been tutored by our village magician, ~~and we knew it would keep the Devils at bay.~~

The village magician was the man who visited great-grandfather most often. In spite of his magic, There was nothing fearful about his appearance. Small and

~~mild~~ gentle-mannered, he thrust his head shyly to one side, when great-grandfather talked to him. Even though he may not have been shy, ~~it~~ it was the proper thing to do. It showed respect. Though he was one of the lower castes, ~~who were~~ not allowed to enter the house, great-grandfather allowed him to sit on a mat beside his bed, because of his magic. The man could exorcise a curse, or cause anybody to fall ill, by burying some of the victim's hair, or his nail-parings, with some other things, like chicken's liver and ox-blood, in front of his house; or by making an image of the victim and driving nails into it. That was the reason why great-grandfather's nail-parings were so carefully buried by the village barber! The magician and he ~~often~~ spoke in whispers, and ~~he~~ great-grandfather ~~often~~ took out, from his cupboard, his magical texts, inscribed on dry palm leaves, with a stylus, to discuss them with him. He plied the low-caste man with arrack inside the house, which was against village etiquette, and the magician often nipped out to bring ~~in~~ him more bottles. ~~Great-grandfather was fond of his liquor.~~ Grandfather-with-the-beard frowned ~~frowned~~ when he saw the apologetic magician enter. Grandfather, with beard down to the waist, and intense bright eyes, frowned on necromancy, ~~with disgust~~. But he could never stop great-grandfather, old as he was, from doing anything he wanted to. No one had that much authority in his household, since great-grandfather was our oldest relative, except, of course, for our gther great-grandfather in the village, but he did not belong to our household.

Sometimes, the village magician and great-grandfather called one of ~~the~~ us children, and presented us with a piece of glass on which there was a round or triangular spot, made of some black mixed ~~coating~~ substance, to a magical formula. "Do you see anything?" they asked. Often we did not. But sometimes we thought we saw a human figure or an animal, which ~~interested~~ interested them greatly. "The formula was right!" ~~the magician rubbed his hands~~ ~~gleefully~~ happily said,

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As a child, there were three things about great-grandfather which specially fascinated me ... his nostrils, his earrings and his eating habits. The most remarkable thing about him were his nostrils. A long, retroussé nose ended, surprisingly, in large, open nostrils, set in well-formed side bulbs. Their size fascinated me. They were like tents, or rooms, and I often found myself ~~staring~~ staring into their sunlit interiors. It was easy, since, ~~in Atchuvely~~, he sat on his old-fashioned high bed, and we were on chairs down below. The view

was unobstructed. The barber who visited him daily for his shave cleared off the nose hairs, periodically, with a vicious-looking lean razor.

His earrings were fascinating, since they were the heaviest I had ever seen on a man. Other men in our village wore earrings, including many of our relatives, but none so magnificent a pair as great-grandfather. Triple-bobbed and heavy and exqusitely fashioned in gold, they made his ears long like those on Gupta statues of the Lord Buddha, for centuries a mark of good breeding. When he moved, they swung gracefully, lending dignity to his sun-tanned face. That was why we always referred to him as Great-Grandfather-with-the-Ear-Bobs, to distinguish him from our other great-grandfather, (whom we called great-grandfather 2 the Functions: that was where he lived.)

When he had his meals in solitary splendour in the Salai or reception hall, across the courtyard, (we lived in the main building opposite), we children crowded round him. Sitting on the high bed, he ate off a large banana leaf placed on wicker-work on top of a tall tea-poy. Great-grandfather would never eat off a plate, since he considered them unclean. But before he ate he placed some rice and small portions of all the curries on one side of the leaf. That was for our late great-grandmother, and it was thrown away with the leaf, which was used only once.

Beside the leaf-plate, and on the tea-poy, was placed a bowl of water, and a gold pin. If a grain of rice fell off the leaf-plate, he picked it up with the pin, and washed it in the bowl, before returning it to the plate. He told us it was a sin to waste even a single grain of rice, and he quoted the 1st Century quatrain of Avveiyar to prove it:

> We toil, we beg, move across the seas,
> Worship, rule, make music, erect our songs;
> All this to keep this wretched body of ours,
> Which tortures us for a grain of rice.

One day a thoughtless servant girl served him lunch on an English

porcelain plate. He got furious at that, he tchiked, and dashed it to pieces on the floor. We had never seen him so furious.

Great-grandfather was a great story-teller, chiefly about his ~~fighting against the British (I have never been able to comfirm this) and about his~~ own adventures among the demons and goblins. Sitting on the ~~his~~ high bed, or lying in a Singapore chair, which is a blond ~~[illegible]~~

My uncle, his grandson, who was of the fifth generation fell seriously ill, at the age of 21, but he recovered. Great-grandfather never told us whether he had anything to do with the event. He and the magician never discussed such important matters in our presence.

When we were in great-grandfather's company, somehow we were, somehow, always in touch with magic! During our country rambles, we found offerings to spirits hung on the trees, in pots, and bamboo cradles, and sacrifices of eatables and flowers on banana leaves alongside the paths.

was our oldest relative, except of course grandfather-with-the-beard's father, great-grandfather-of-the-Junction who lived to be a hundred and three years old, but he doesn't come into this story.

The village magician and great-grandfather often spoke in whispers. He plied the man with arrack inside the house, which was against village etiquette. One day I remember great-grandfather asked me whether I would like to get him a bottle from the tavern. I felt greatly honoured and took pains to bring it in without being seen by grandfather.

When we went out walking with great-grandfather we were somehow always in constant touch with the supernatural. The very trees became afflicted with magic. He would stare at the offerings to spirits hung on them, in pots and bamboo cradles, and at the 'sacrifices' of eatables and flowers on banana leaves alongside the paths. When we came across a karagam he would pause, study it, and mutter "Hm" very significantly. Karagams are pots of terra cotta or brass, full of water, and decorated with a tall cone of mango leaves, oleander, cocoanut flowers, and a lime stuck on a pointed stick. They were meant to ward off evil spirits, and he always seemed to know what the purpose of each one was. He also studied, carefully, the carved figures of patients nailed on the trees by the village magician, or his rivals. The Devil, or the Affliction, had passed from the patient into the tree, which looked blissful of the trickery that had been practiced on it. When we passed tamarind groves, cremation grounds, or sides of tanks -- favourite haunts of devils -- he inscribed a cabalistic figure with mystical

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thunder had brought out, quite unlike any other mushrooms I have ever seen. The bright, red earth of Atchuvely split with the thunder (or so I thought) and the mushrooms peeped through the cracks like pale pink animals. It was one of the most magical things for me. When curried ~~cooked~~ they didn't taste like mushrooms, but flesh. In fact, I had a cousin who felt convinced that cooked mushrooms were not plants, but little animals, like the famous tiny cuttlefish of Trincomalee. That was because he had never been out mushroom picking, after it thundered, as we had.

When it drizzled, great-grandfather ~~set out for the fields with two men.~~ we set out with and two men for the rice-fields. ~~I never went with them but heard~~ They smoked out small, ~~white~~ furred animals that lived in the burrows. No one else in our family liked eating these field creatures, or the flesh of the sea turtle; but he liked them both, which conferred some wierd distinction on him. we children didn't like the again

He had his own eating etiquette as well, which again gave him a rather special place in our minds. One day a thoughtless servant girl had served him lunch on an English porcelain plate. He got furious at that, he tchicked, and dashed it to pieces on the floor. Great-grandfather would never eat off plates because he considered them unclean. So every day a one and a half foot square banana leaf was placed on wicker-work on top of a tall tea poy. That was cunning since the leaves repelled moisture so well that water separated on them into bright, silvery globules, like mercury. He ate his meals off it, sitting on his high bed. Before he commenced he placed some rice and small portions of all the curries on one side. That was for

One of the strangest events connected with my great-grandfather, ~~that I can recall,~~ concerned the disappearance of my youngest brother, Singham, from the house, and how the search for him ended. ~~I felt let down by great-grandfather on that occasion.~~

Brother Rutnam and I were rivals for the leadership of our other brothers who were split up into two parties led by him and me. Nowadays, he said, he didn't believe in great-grandfather's stories, since devils didn't exist! He threatened I would find out. ~~Nayagam~~ Singham and I, of course, believed in devils, but, after what happened, my faith in them was rather shaken.

One sultry afternoon my brothers and I were ~~saw~~ two-a-bed for our siesta. We were used to sharing, since we often camped, all in a bed roll, in the jungle. We felt bored. The afternoon breeze, which one notices most in the plains of the North, rustled the mango leaves pleasantly, but no sleep would come.

"Let us ask great-grandfather for a story," Singham said.

"Oh no," brother Rutnam replied, "he will be resting." Singham and I jumped out of bed, all the same, and went, followed by Rutnam, and more slowly, by Nayagam, who trailed us wherever we went. He was about three at the time.

We entered the salai and saw great-grandfather lounging in the Singapore chair, a newspaper spread on his chest. He stared at us with wide open eyes, guessing the nature of our mission.

"But we ~~xxxx~~ can't sleep!" I said.

He looked sternly at us. "Don't you children know what is happening?"

"What?" brother Rutnam asked.

"The Devil is out collecting children in his sack, on his annual holiday. You'd better get back to bed, and sleep!" he said, and Nayagam, who was the most timid in the family, looked rather frightened.

"How do you know?" brother Rutnam asked. At that time he was of the opinion demons didn't exist. "You will find out!" he had threatened. ~~told us~~.

"I can tell!" great-grandfather replied.

That settled it for me. "Let us hide!" I said, and grabbing Nayagam by his hand ran back to our room. We climbed into bed and covered ourselves with thick blankets although it was hot. It was dark inside, and we sweated. To this day, I can remember the exact color of that darkness.

I must have sat there for about half an hour, with Nayagam asking questions, which made no sense. I wondered why brother Rutnam and Singham had not come in with us.

"Big Brother (he was never to be addressed by name), are you there?" I shouted, but there was no reply.

We rushed out of the room. I would have been glad to see anybody at that moment.

"Have you seen Singham and Big Brother?" I asked mother who was in her room playing ~~thayam-cronchu~~ / a dice game / with a friend.

"No. What's the matter?" she asked.

"The Devil is stealing children to eat them!" shouted Nayagam.

"Did great-grandfather tell you that?" mother asked, rather startled.

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"Please great-grandfather, a story!" ~~someone~~ I said.

"A story!" he grunted. "You should be asleep!"

"But we can't sleep!" ~~we~~ I said.

He looked sternly at us. "Don't you children know what is happening?"

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"How do you know?" brother Rutnam asked. ~~He was being bold as usual.~~ At that time he was of the opinion demons didn't exist. "You will find out!" he told us.

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"Have you seen Singham and Big Brother?" I asked mother who was in her room playing (Thayam - Eluvalu) with a friend.

"No. What's the matter?" she asked.

"The Devil is stealing children to eat them!" shouted Nayagam.

"Yes," we answered.

"You silly children! Only old people believe in some of the things your great-grandfather does. I don't believe in demons, and neither should you! Now go to your room and get some sleep!" she said.

I felt completely taken aback by mother's unconcern.

Rutnam walked in, as I was sitting in our room, figuring it all out.

"Where is Singham?" I asked.

"Oh, I dared him to come out for a walk with me, and he did. I called at the tree-climbers for a young coconut, and then he just disappeared! I suppose he is hiding from the devil!" he joked.

"Come on, let's look for him," I said. "What if he has run away to Jaffna Town?"

We went looking for him in the salai. "Have you seen Singham anywhere great-grandfather?" brother Rutnam asked him.

"He has run away. He is hiding from the Devil," Nayagam told him.

"Oh is he? Well then, let's look for him!" he said, rising from the Singapore chair.

We searched for him at the servants' cottages, the farmers' cottages, and finally at Velu, the tree-climber's, who was the man who plucked kurumbas or drinking coconuts for us, and of which we were very fond. He was nowhere. We were beginning to feel alarmed.

"He was here with your Big-Great-Grandson a short while ago, but he didn't stay for a coconut," the tree-climber said.

We skirted the estate thinking we might see him somewhere in the distance. We couldn't think where to look next.

And then we came across him! We were in the tamarind grove, near the tree-climber's and, as we passed the thick trunk of its oldest

"Did great-grandfather tell you that?" asked mother, rather startled.

"Yes," we answered.

"You silly children! Only ~~very~~ old people believe in some of the things your great-grandfather does. I don't believe in demons, and neither should you! Now go to our room and get some sleep!" she said.

I felt completely taken aback by mother's unconcern. ~~And then the crushing significance of what she had just said struck me. If mother didn't believe in them, demons, they couldn't possibly exist!~~

~~I felt glad brother Rutnam hadn't been there. How he would have crowed!~~

Rutnam ~~He~~ walked in, as I was sitting in our room, ~~working~~ figuring it all out.

"Where is Singham?" I asked.

"Oh, I dared him to come out for a walk with me, and he did. I called at the tree-climber's for a young cocoanut, and then he just disappeared! I suppose he is hiding from the devil!" he joked.

"Come on, let's look for him," I said. "What if he has ~~had~~ run away to Jaffna Town? ~~as some boys had done?~~

We went looking for him in the salai. "Have you seen Singham anywhere great-grandfather?" brother Rutnam asked him.

"He has run away. He is hiding from the Devil," Nayagam told him.

"Oh is he? Well then, let's look for him!" he said, rising from the Singapore chair.

We searched for him at the servants' cottages, the farmers' cottages, and finally at the tree-climber's, Velan, who was the man who plucked cocoanuts, He was nowhere. We were beginning to feel alarmed.

~~cocoanuts~~ Kurumbas or drinking cocoanuts for us, of which we were ~~fond of~~ very fond.

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should he show symptoms of remembering what he had heard mother tell us. But it seemed to be hidden deep down somewhere in him, beyond recall.

My resentment passed before long, and I was attending the story-telling again. I watched brother Rutnam, wondering whether he guessed what was on my mind, but he never did. To this day I have kept it a secret, and I feel like laughing at the prospect of him finding out after all these years!

The last time I saw great-grandfather, in 1937, when he was about a hundred and one years old. His head-knot was thinner but his handlebar ~~seemed smaller than I had ever seen~~, but his nostrils were as large and magnificent as ever. ~~I was about to leave for a long stay in England and I felt like reminding him that the Pax Brittanica had come to the island in 1815, but I didn't. If he hadn't fought against the British, his father or his great-grandfather must have, and exactly how much difference is there between a great-grandfather and his son? I didn't feel it was worth the trouble of finding out.~~ The village magician was also there, drinking his arrack, sitting on a chair, this time. He looked older and milder, and in fact a nice old man. He was glad to see me.

I reminded great-grandfather of the day he had told us the demon was collecting children in his sack. He looked at me from his faded, brown eyes, not really remembering which of his innumerable forgetfully, and then said, "I believe he was!" He flicked his thumb at the magician and added, "Now you are big, perhaps he will teach you some of his mantrams (charms)!"

~~great-grandchildren I am~~

The last time I saw great-grandfather was in 1937, when he was past his hundredth year. His head-knot was thinner, but his nostrils were as large and magnificent as ever. The village magician ~~as~~ was there, ~~xixxx~~ also, drinking his arrack, sitting on a chair, this time. He looked older and milder, and, in fact, a nice old man. He was glad to see me.

I reminded great-grandfather of the day he had told us the demon was collecting children in his sack. He looked at me with his faded, brown eyes, forgetfully, not really knowing which of his ~~innumerable~~ many great-grandchildren I was, and then said, "I believe he was!" He flicked his thumb at the magician and added, "Now you are big, perhaps he will teach you some of his mantrams (charms)!"

The magician giggled, holding his head to one side, as he always did when great-grandfather talked to him. When Grandfather-with-the-Beard walked in, he took the situation in at a glance. "Still talking of magic?" he asked good-humoredly.

A year later great-grandfather was dead -- of old age. I was in England, and ~~felt xxidy sad. I thought the village magician must have been one of the most bereft of all.~~ I remember the village magician there, and thought that he would be one of the people to miss great-grandfather most.

Though his tomb in our village has no lamp burning all night, ~~over it,~~ as his daughter's, my grandmother's, has, (lit every evening by a sorrowing husband), I feel sure, as the Old Wives of Atchuvely say, the goblins and demons keep well clear of it. They must know there lies someone who held them at bay for well over a hundred years. It is unusual, even for our xx parts, where most ~~of us~~ people are long lived.

SWAMI ROCK, RAGA ROCK

by Tambimuttu

Swami Rock, which played a part in the shaping of my life, and my family's, was a wonder to me before I ever read of the other wonders of the world in the books at the Catholic school, in Trincomalee, where I was educated until I was seven. Admittedly, the Franco-Ceylon atmosphere of the small school was exotic. The bearded priests, in white cassocks and dangling black sashes, which alternated with magenta, were French, with one Ceylonese and one Indian -- Fr. Bonnel, with white, tobacco-stained beard, stretching well below his navel, dispensing beautifully grained wooden kazoos from France (the sounding diaphragm was purple paper, of special manufacture, and there were whole orchestras of kazoos in France); Fr. Dupont, from an industrialist family that manufactured textiles and candy, and his memorable present of a heraldic standard of silk for the school, woven in one of the family's factories, and, for the boys, chocolate with liquer and brandy centers; handsome Fr. Gregory, the Brahmin from India, later Prefect of Sports and Discipline, in my college in Colombo, first cousin to my favorite nun, Sister Dolores. But Swami Rock was more fulvous and fulsome, more exciting. Its bare-chested priests, wearing the sacred triple thread, chanting into the wind's throat, on top of the high cliff, and showering flowers into the shuddering sea, were echoes from millenia ago when one of the six great linga, or phallus, temples, sacred to India and Lord Shiva, stood on this spot.

Ceylonese history was not taught at school (we were cramming for the external examinations of the Universities of Cambridge and

London) and what history I was taught by my family, or learned from the gossip and folk-tales of our own people, was scoffed at. Ours was only myth and legend, uncorroborated by scholarship and the archaelogical finesse of Europe. Even the pioneer work of our own historians, my uncle S. Gnana Prakasar, for instance, exerted an influence only when he based his judgements on Portuguese, Dutch or British sources. Whatever our historians had gathered from Ceylon and Indian records was not history since we claimed for ours an impossible antiquity.

Swami Rock, which had fired my imagination as a boy, was a case in point, along with many others, including statements in my grandfather's biography (at least I had treasured the photos -- the two great-grandfathers I had never seen, the other two I had known and loved, especially the Hindu-orientated one) and points about my family's history which I had learned from the lips of our ayahs as they fed me. Dinner time was story time out of sheer necessity, to keep our minds off the gustatory excercies, and it was confusing to me during my long school years that I had not seen any of the historical tales we had heard in print. They constituted 'embarassing knowledge', making me uneasy and apprehensive of my own family.

It's only after Independence there have been many interesting and probing articles about some of them in The Ceylon Daily News and The Times of Ceylon. It was only as recently as May 1967, for instance, that the latter journal sent me a scholarly version of one of my favorite dinnertime stories, the story about one of my ancestors, Pootha Tambi, descendant of Pararajasingham VIII, King of Jaffna. It was a stirring story for us children involving the building of a fort on the romantic and magical island of Hammanhiel between India and Ceylon, a beautiful lady, his wife, who had

The lingam, planted in its square, leaf-shaped and other pedestal yonis, was placed in the sanctum sanctorum of Shiva temples which are in the majority in India. Sometimes a simple mound of earth, an upright oval pebble or a stalagmite in the icy caves of the Himalayas, as at Badrinath, sufficed for worshippers. Although this was not the original lingam of the Temple, Brahmin priests had very cleverly preserved ~~xxx~~ the meaning of the terrain in the colossal symbol of Swami Rock, fooling the European puritanism, ignorant of its meaning, which had ordered the naked arms and torsos of the Kathakali (storytelling) dancers of Malabar covered in red flannel, and attempted to do the same with the naked breasts of our Rodiya girls in Ratnapura Province. (The story goes that the king's mischievous chef had served him roast monkey. The infuriated king had ordered him and his descendents thrust down a few social scales to the Rodiya caste whose people should henceforth forbear to wear clothes above their waists, which to my mind is a blessing, not a punishment, in the tropics. All this information was not, of course, available to me during my years in Trincomalee which ~~was chagred~~ were charged with the irrelevancy of Christianity to my own life, and that of my family, my intense involvement with the mystery of Swami Rock, and the search for some evidence, however slight, that Thirukonarmalai Temple was not a figment of our anti-colonial, defensive, or agressive minds.

It is impossible for me to describe the perfect high that a Hindu temple with its site, its rituals and atmosphere gives me; the total ~~involement~~ involvement with all one's senses engaged, liberating, exhilarating, like a plate of very hot rice and curry (Ceylon has the hottest curries in the world), savored with sweat pricking and flowing from the hair roots and forehead, psychedelic, round flavored and universalizing in its intent and being....all individual flavors and

and feelings lost in a oneness, the long note in which all the flavors persist in an indescribable but deeply felt unity. The self, ego, lost in the universal flow of hot energy, one hundred per cent energy, through the yoga of taste. Harmony with one's surroundings. The perfect high. For instance I remember my first visit to Mahabalipuram in South India. (The poet Louis MacNeice rushing at me in the Stag's Head pub in London after his first tour for the BBC in India: "Ah Tambi, South India... You must go to South India... Mahabalipuram!") The temples chiselled out of solid rock, pillars, rooms, deities, attendants and beasts, lamp holders; the landscaped water by the temples and the fierce sea-wind driving across like a sound boom from a gigantic, high flyer with a hundred jets. The facades of the temples eroded by the invisible, blown sand, the features of the many cows surrounding one of them sand-blasted into blobs of Henry Moore heads. Out at sea the sunken temples, and nearer shore, bobbing out of the water, eroded shrines and other works of granite laced by the million-eyed foam, winking in the afternoon sun. It was from this great port that Indian ships had sailed with Buddhism, Hinduism, merchandize and settlers to Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, China and further. I was curry-high again and at Swami Rock, with that howling wind of home blowing monolithic through me as if through a tunnel: the Hindu symbols pat, pat, pot, vivid in front of me like blood cells, with the static of memory roaring in the energy circuits. Which I heard again on the high eyrie at Thirukalukunram, reminiscent of the Rock, as the eagle swooped down to the constructed pond on top of the eyrie at sunset every evening to be fed by the Brahmins as part of the temple's ritual, surrounded by a glut of temples on the plain, courtyard within courtyard with highly ornamented

five yards of cloth wrapped round the waist like a sari. Whenever he wished to punish a boy, he asked him to hold out a palm and then rapped it with the edge of a footruler. I had often been his victim and, as far as I remember, he was the only teacher who was such a disciplinarian.

He made me feel very uncomfortable with his large, black, moist eyes, his coaxing, insinuating speech and the moist look of his mouth. There was something subterranean and pleading about him which terrified me. I had often felt that he wished to take me aside to have a private conversation and he had time and gain suggested a visit to his house which I took pains to avoid or sneak past quickly.

As for the boys, we were a motley lot. Some wore shoes and boots and others sandals. The Moors, who are Mohammedans, wore colorful sarongs, which are known in America as Madras prints, with red fez and black tassel for headgear, while the Tamil Hindus preferred their "national costume" which is the long verti, with or without a thin ornamental border of vermilion and yellow which matched the pottu or caste mark of sandalwood paste and vermilion on their foreheads. The boys from families which had to traffick with or work for the British (politicians and some business men excluded) dressed like the British in shirt, shorts and tie. These woolen-socked and heavy booted boys considered themselves the in-people, a feeling that I myself have experienced, which accentuated the split nature of my personality occilating between the European and non-European. I felt exhilarated and proud when my grandfather dressed in black coat, turban of scarlet and gold and foam of white verti playing over Arabian Nights' shoes took us out riding in the phaeton. He flicked the coiled whip and we bowled down the roads of Atchuvely

which were limestone white when I was a boy, built of the limestone rock of the peninsula, crushed by the wheels of the bullock carts. My father and some members of the family dressed similarly on ceremonial occasions and holidays while others stuck stubbornly to their vertis and kurtaus (long Indian shirts).

The feelings of division, hostility, confusion, superiority and inferiority, and so on, evoked by clothes alone would be unfamiliar to a more homogeneously dressed people like the British or American, though there was a humdrum snobism about them in the England I knew which was, however, free of the several implications intended by us. In Ceylon or India, the dress and the way it is worn indicates race, religion, sect, profession, caste and marital state. People wore Hindu or non-Hindu clothes in public and these too were apt to be changed abruptly. The most dramatic exhibition of the phenomenon happens daily on the Colombo-Talaimanaar Express. The passengers who board the night train en masse in Colombo, and are tightly packed in the compartments, are Tamils, mostly in European dress, on their way to the Jaffna peninsula. They are the most conservative and yet progressive people in Ceylon, Jaffna Tamils, Jaffnese, who consider themselves distinct from the Indian Tamils of Ceylon.

By daybreak the jungle has given way to the coral palins and salt estuaries of the North with groves of coconut and palmyrah, and the passengers have been transmogrified overnight, effecting a sartorial and personality change. The starched, constricting suits and shoes intended for the jungles or a cold climate have disappeared in an avalanche of silk vertis, kurtaus, and sandals, and limp bracelets of cleverly interlinked gold, flat as a watch band, dangle gracefully from wrist

from wrists, the affectation of the dandies. Cigarettes have been routed by the concerted assault of the northern-grown Jaffna cheroot which is named after the Tamil word churutu ... something rolled. The acrid fumes released have quickened and excited conversation, the former bi-lingualism drowned with the sole use of Tamil, the voices deafening and sing-song in the manner of farmers and villagers, deliberately raised as a protest to present affronts to their individuality and sense of nationalism, with others trying to steer a sheepish middle course.

I felt the same stress and strain in my class at school. The obviously middle course boys were Sethukavaler, son of a government official in the kaccheri (town hall) and Brito whose family lived in Fort Frederick in a small house on top of soaring steps and a hillock which intrigued me.

Every stone and shard in Fort Frederick had an esoteric meaning for me and, from its age, I imagined the house was built by the Portuguese and may therefore incorporate parts of the fabric of Thirukonarmalai Temple. The other two boys who stood out in my class were Hindu Suppiah and the Moor, Mohammed, with the fez and tassel and sarong, whose father owned a general store in the bazaar and meat and fish market section of Trincomalee.

I often wandered there in the evenings fascinated by the brightly lit one-room shops of silks, chiffons, organdies, saris of gold and silver, a cascade of color as the shopkeepers unrolled and heaped them for display on the floor. The scent of the new cloths was freshening and heady like the sachets of blotting paper some companies sent out.

Suppiah lived by the modern Hindu Temple, some distance beyond the bazaar, in what was the Hindu quarter, the quarter of mysteries, and invariably wore a pottu of sandalwood with a spot of vermilion

in its center, in the middle of his forehead.

One Saturday, I paid him a visit on my own, an unusual mission for me since it was so far away. Like Swami Rock, and the houses of my Hindu relatives, his place had an aura of "otherness" which fired my imagination. I expected to find some sign, some great, healing revelation there...perhaps in the pergola of jasmine that led to the front door, which had the characteristic Hindu garland of mango leaves strung across it; perhaps in the side room inside the house, the worship and meditation room, where an oil lamp burned in front of a framed oleograph of Ganesha, the jolly, big-bellied son of Lord Shiva, the Supreme God. He is the most popular god in India and Ceylon who is invoked before journeys and any sort of undertaking. Two multi-wicked brass lamps which were not in use stood on the floor on their tall pedestals flanking a polished chembu or engraved brass pot filled with a bouquet of yellow and vermilion flowers from the garden ringed with spears of mango leaves. This puja or worship room was dark like the innermost sanctum of Hindu temples, evoking the same sensations of the primeval and the secret, the centre of the earth with its brooding silence, as I imagined it at the time, the cave.

Suppiah was delighted to see me. "Did the temple really exist?" I could not help asking him. He beleived it had, and that it now lay at the bottom of the ocean floor.

To complete the "otherness" of the afternoon, Suppiah's mother sent the servant out to buy some Bengal-gram (ulunthu) doughnuts made fat with hot water and curds for tea, a delicacy of Brahmin tea-shops. Since we never had them at home (they are seldom made at home, I didn't know at the time) and a Hindu cousin of my father's also served these when we visited him, I've always associated them with Hindu households. Suppiah's house had ancient roots, undisturbed

and search as I might for an ancient inscription, all it showed were the incisions and scribblings made on it by the children. We stood in a semi-circle round it for our singing lessons and the words of the songs I learned, mixed with the sea-breeze, still hum in my ears.

Poor Mary is a-weeping, is a-weeping, is a-weeping
Poor Mary is a-weeping by the side of the sea.

I'm weeping for my true love, my true love, my true love
I'm weeping for my true love by the side of the sea.

Another focus of our search was at the base of the towering and venerable rain-tree by the cool Rest House since shrines for worship are sometimes built at the base of such trees, besides the bo, banyan and neem. What we found were irididescent beetles which we kept alive in matchboxes, with rain-tree leaves, to no purpose. The most intriguing spot was the man-hole cover on the seaward fringe of the esplanade. Rumor said it was the exit from a secret tunnel from the Fort. Workmen had once entered it and discovered colonies of snakes.

One Sunday, Suppiah and my brothers were at one of our favorite pastimes, jumping down to the beach from the sea-wall that buttressed the road and entrance to the Fort, when he gave me a tiny bronze statuette of Ganesha, the big-bellied elephant-faced god.

"I thought you might like to have it. My grandmother gave it to me long ago," he said.

The image was passed from hand to hand and Suppiah told us the story of how Shiva's son came by his elephant head. His wife was so proud of his beauty when he was born that she asked the evil planet, Saturn, to admire him.

"Don't show him to me," warned the planet. "You know I destroy everything I look at."

But the proud mother, wife of Shiva, the supreme god, wouldn't listen.

"Look!" she said, unveiling the child's head, and it was instantly consumed.

The distraught mother bore his limp body to Lord Shiva.

"Go into the jungle," Shiva ordered his attendants. "Hurry! Bring me the head of the first animal you meet."

The first animal they found was a baby elephant. They cut its head off and hurried back with it, and Shiva attached it to his son's body. That is how the much loved and jolly Indian god, with the elephant's small eyes, happens to be elephant-faced.

Suppiah's gift was indeed a treasure. It was the first time I had had the image of a Hindu God all to myself and I did not look for fragments of Hindu sculpture in the walls of the fort that day, nor in the rusting gun-emplacements and ruined houses, and the jungly patches within the Fort. I had a piece of sculpture that was all my own, and it was burning a hole in the pocket of my shorts.

The sky was a blaze of color that evening at Swami Rock as the officiating priest at the furthermost end of the dangerous crag first purified himself with water poured from a delicate bass lota. He seemed as ancient as the earth, and the granite in the ocean below, with a sinuous string of large rastrakuta seeds round his neck. More and more worshippers arrived, as scantily clad as he, bearing libations of water or milk in brown earthnware chatties, and offerings of coconuts, coconut flowers, jasmine, oleander, betel leaves, money, bunches of bananas, rice. Surya, the Sun God, was closing his opaline eyes, bathing Trincomalee with his flood of blessing. The priest spoke to him in the ancient tongue, with the people responding. It seemed the earth rumbled, and the stars came out to watch. Chanting more fervently, he poured water and milk on the colossal lingam and then cast the people's gifts into the waters of Narayana from the

giddy heights, the fruits of the earth unto the Giver, for Narayana (Vishnu) and Brahma of the Aryan Brahmins are but Shiva (Goodness) the most ancient pre-Aryan god of the Indians, as are graphically incised on the stone lingams of Ceylon. He kindled Agni, the God of Fire, on the rock, and held aloft a burning brand as the people threw up their arms heavenward. The Sun's eyes were closed and the priest covered the earth with gossamer incense from the brass censer he swung high over his head, binding everything present, and not present, into a close unity. The incense. The love-in of universals at Swami Rock.

Then he descended from the crag and with the ashes of Agni made the sign of Shiva on each worshipper's forehead. And I had a feeling that at least a part of the puja (holy mass) was intended for the god in my pocket. I was not far wrong since, as I learned in later years, sculptures of Shiva and his wife Parvati, in the temples, often included his sons Ganesha and Subramanya, the God of War, in one sweeping concept.

I was proud of my possession when I got home, and put him on display to my parents, who smiled indulgently.

"I must take you to Manipay Hindu Temple. My grandfather was a trustee," my father said. I was pleased, but the dualism of my family, always impenetrable, was, as usual, perplexing to me.

But I owned Ganesha for one day only. I had him in my school satchel on my desk. Unfortunately for Ganesha and me, it was during the period of the Maths teacher. As he passed down the rows of desks, footrule in hand, peering at our work papers and making us highly nervous, he spotted Ganesha.

"What is this?" he roared, snatching him up.

The whites of his moist eyes which were usually red, through

over indulgence in arrack, I thought, and demons had red eyes, looked fearsome as they rolled in their sockets. Seized by powerful emotions, his eyes sparked more fiercely than usual.

"I am confiscating this," he shouted, "and I'll report you to the Principal."

I waited apprehensively for the note I would have to take up the long aisle to the Principal, the Ceylonese priest, Fr. Marian, to be reprimanded, which was an ordeal that troubled me for days, and then remained as a threat and menace. He was the fountainhead of authority and virtue and that ineffable goodness, touchstone of my own, which had once forced me late at night to steal to his room and make a clean breast of having lied to the drama director.

During rehearsals for our annual play, there was a part where I had to guffaw in an acceptable British manner. My production was put down by the director who gave us his own version, which sounded as wierd to me. He guffawed, and I guffawed, and the performance was so ridiculous and embarassing, just guffawing to the empty air with nothing to follow, that I fell silent when it came to the speaking part. I pretended illness and went home to be troubled by my conscience all evening. Then, when it was very dark, I stole to the rectory to make a clean breast of it to Fr. Marian, to confess I had not really been ill at all, an incident I still don't like to think about, since the experience was so painful and unreal.

And now Suppiah and other friends shot sympathetic glances at me, as I sat tensed for another confrontation with him. And I was filled with hatred for the maths teacher.

Fortunately, the bell for the interval between study periods rang, and the note to the Principal was never written. But I had lost Ganesha and felt troubled as I lay in bed, that night, listening

to the thunder of the waves in Eastern Bay.

I wondered what the maths teacher had done with Ganesha, and my resentment against him mounted up rather alarmingly. It was his custom to draw us round in an arc, of prey, in front of his desk, for excercising us in "mental arithmetic", a procedure fraught with tension and apprehension which numbed my brain, and made me even more hopeless at figures.

"Subtract 813 from 1,350. What is the square root of 25?" he fired his questions at us, and swung his heavy footruler whenever he felt a boy was too dense.

And that was how the curtain fell on my schooldays at Trincomalee. The "mental arithmetic" session had been too hectic and confusing that morning, and it ended up with the teacher belabouring me with the footruler. I tore it from him, snapped it across my knee and threw it on the floor. Then, I marched up the aisle to Fr. Marian's desk, and blurted out angrily: "That man.... has beaten me. I am never coming back to your school again!"

I walked home and explained to my father why I could not go back to school again. "You don't have to go back to school," he said simply when he returned from his visit to the Principal, rather flushed, and I was grateful. He had seen my point of view, and I was proud of him. In fact, from that day on, none of us went back to school. My elder brother caught a train for Colombo within a few days to stay with my maternal uncle and attend the premier Catholic college in the island and we were to follow him. I think my father had decided his children were now old enough to receive "higher" education, after our incubation periods in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Trincomalee. His own idyllic days in Trincomalee were over. I visited Suppiah and my other friends, and my favorite, Sister Dolores,

lacuna in one of my double selves had been filled up, a process which works in either direction bolstering either man, and is continuous.

Some time later, I was also stirred to learn of the discovery of one of the icons of worship that the Sunken Temple's priests had spirited away. Workmen, on the esplanade by Fort Frederick, had dug up a great bronze statue of Shiva's consort, Parvati, which is on permanent exhibit in Colombo Museum today. According to our fifth century poet, Varotheiyan, the temple had been built by a Tamil king from the Coromandel coast in the year 512 of the Kali, or fourth and final, Age of the present cycle of evolution and dissolution of our universe, or B.C.2588. Rev. James Cartman in his 1957 book Hinduism in Ceylon comments on this: "The date B.C.2588 is most doubtful, but the reference to the famous temple is genuine. This famous temple, known as the temple of a thousand columns, once stood 400 ft. above sea level upon the Svami Rock which is situated in Fort Frederick. This Rock, about which many strange legends are told, has long been a place of pilgrimage." I also learned from Rev. Carter's book that two stones from the original fabric of the temple are to be seen on either side of the main entrsnce to the Fort. On them are carved the twin fish emblem of an Indian king who invaded Ceylon in recent times and claims to have planted his flag in Trincomalee. These two happenings relieved me of one of the nagging doubts involving the genuineness and validity of my Ceylonese heritage.

As for our not eating enough meat, and rice being debilitating, I had satisfactorily solved the problem for myself while still at school. The most celebrated dinner of the Dutch in Indonesia (now transported to gourmet restaurants in Amsterdam) was rijstaffel, or

rice-table, which is rice with several curries, curry being a misnomer since grilled sausages, or bacon or meat, cut bite-size, would also be curries for us, It was rijstaffel, sanctified by a foreign name, that sustained us in Ceylon, according to tastes and needs created by our climate, and the Dutch did not err in their preference. I remembered that at my grandmother's house, in Atchuvely, we had the inevitable thirty-six dishes to choose from, on Sundays. Some of them were only relishes of the shrimp and eggplant, fish blachang, or mango chutney sort, but there was no lack in the variety of cooked meats, seafood, fruits, flowers, vegetables, and grains of all kinds.

Impressed with this discovery, I once wrote an article for The Ceylon Observer, whereupon a lady of Dutch descent wrote to say she had had more than a hundred dishes to cope with when she was a little girl. I think her name was van Dort, and she was well over a hundred years old. It was compliment enough for our cuisine which is as subtle and potent, in every way, for our climate, as Indian music.

As for my double self, in today's world of raga rock and yoga, flowers and incense, and flower power, it would be reasonable to assume that they have merged.

I cannot say so since, in many a situation, I find a western echo in an eastern setting attractive. I am content to be double, at least, nowadays, since I've actually always wanted to be the sound in the holy Brahmin's conch.

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SWAMI ROCK, RAGA ROCK

Swami Rock, which played a part in the shaping of my life, and my family's, was a wonder to me before I ever read of the other wonders of the world in the books at the Catholic school, in Trincomalee, where I was educated until I was seven. Admittedly, the Franco-Ceylon atmosphere of the small school was exotic. The bearded priests, in white cassocks and dangling black sashes, which alternated with magenta, were French, with one Ceylonese and one Indian - Fr. Bonnel, with white, tobacco-stained beard, stretching well below his navel, dispensing beautifully grained wooden kazoos from France (the sounding diaphragm was purple paper, of special manufacture, and there were whole orchestras of kazoos in France); Fr. Dupont, from an industrialist family that manufactured textiles and candy, and his memorable present of a heraldic standard of silk for the school, woven in one of the family's factories, and, for the boys, chocolate with liqueur and brandy centers; handsome Fr. Gregory, the Brahmin from India, later Prefect of Sports and Discipline, in my college in Colombo, first cousin to my favourite nun, Sister Dolores. But Swami Rock was more fulvous and fulsome, more exciting. Its bare-chested priests, wearing the sacred triple thread, chanting into the wind's throat, on top of the high cliff, and showering flowers into the shuddering sea, were echoes from millenia ago when one of the six great linga, or phallus, temples, sacred to India and Lord Shiva, stood on this spot.

Ceylonese history was not taught at school (we were cramming for the external examination of the Universities of Cambridge and London) and what history I was taught by my family, or learned from the gossip and folk-tales of our own people, was scoffed at. Ours

was only myth and legend, uncorroborated by scholarship and the archaeological finesse of Europe. Even the pioneer work of our own historians, my uncle S. Gnana Prakasar, for instance, exerted an influence only when he based his judgements on Portuguese, Dutch or British sources. Whatever our historians had gathered from Ceylon and Indian records was not history since we claimed for ours an impossible antiquity.

Swami Rock, which had fired my imagaination as a boy, was a case in point, along with many others, including statements in my grandfather's biography (at least I had treasured the photos - the two great-grandfathers I had never seen, the other two I had known and loved, especially the Hindu-orientated one) and points about my family's history which I had learned from the lips of our ayahs as they fed me. Dinner time was story time out of sheer necessity, to keep our minds off the gustatory exercises, and it was confusing to me during my long school years that I had not seen any of the historical tales we had heard in print. They constituted 'embarrassing knowledge', making me uneasy and apprehensive of my own family.

It's only after Independence there have been many interesting and probing articles about some of them in The Ceylon Daily News and The Times of Ceylon. It was only as recently as May 1967, for instance, that the latter journal sent me a scholarly version of one of my favourite dinnertime stories, the story about one of my ancestors, Pootha Tambi, descendant of Pararajasingham VIII, King of Jaffna. It was a stirring story for us children, involving the building of a fort on the romantic and magical island of Hammanhiel between India and Ceylon, a beautiful lady, his wife, who had sent a slipper back to a would-be lover (the worst form of insult) and the enraged man betraying Pootha Tambi's intended uprising to the

Dutch Governor with a forged letter. Pootha Tambi was convicted and executed on that evidence. The dramatic ending involved a herd of stampeding elephants. When the would-be lover was being led in chains through the jungle for trial in Colombo, he and his guards were killed by a herd of stampeding elephants, seemingly, but probably brought there for the deed by Pootha Tambi's supporters. Elephants were traditional executioners in Ceylon. But in those days, this bit of history was only myth and legend, along with Swami Rock, and it gave me the split personality very early in life which was characteristic of Ceylonese and Indians in colonial times.

Swami Rock, as I remember, is a giant, roughly spherical boulder, about eighteen feet across, with a pillar of the same granitic rock inserted in its middle, silhouetted starkly against pink and golden dawn skies, or those of brazen and burning sunsets, the skies of Sarasvati, the goddess of night. It had this simple, majestic and elemental setting since it was built at the very edge of the cliff.

The monsoon tempests (Ceylon has two monsoons, unlike India) literally screamed past and the waves roared way, way down below nearly at the centre of the earth where the Sunken Temple of Shiva now lay. The Portuguese, who had given similar treatment to my family in the sixteenth century, had vandalized it in their Christian zeal, hurling it into the sea, and using portions of it for the bastions and walls of what is now Fort Frederick, with Swami Rock within it. This, too, was only a Ceylonese legend, a silly story, and search as I might, and O, how eagerly and often I did that as a boy, I never found a fragment of the magnificent carved granite pillars: only the smooth, accurate, sturdy and lasting architecture of the walls and bastions. I had also seen it in the Portuguese-Dutch-British forts in other parts of the island (they had settled in that

order on the same sites, the French having been driven off) which only further drove home to me in strange, bewildering fashion the reality of European history vs. our own, and the strength and vigor of European feats - even of foods, I believed, since I was told the eating of rice is debilitating and the eating of wheat strengthening. It is necessary to eat much meat to build strong muscle and plenty of fish to nourish the cells of the brain as the great sea-faring nations did. The amount of fish and meat Europeans consumed at one sitting was impressive. We did not eat that much meat and fish, or so I had thought at the time, which further made me hesitant, embarrassed and even apologetic for our customs, manners, ceremonies, beliefs, even not eating fresh scotch salmon which our 'elocution' teacher had extravagantly praised, our lack of history, the feeling stretching back to the years before I was seven, the creeping ~~film~~ mist over the bright film of childhood.

Fort Frederick, to the north of our hibiscus covered Dutch house with its great brick Dutch ovens and, to the south of it, Fort Ostenberg, high on the hill overlooking the third largest natural harbour in the world, large enough to float the entire British fleet, were the symbols of my boyhood predicament at Trincomalee. As I lay at night in that thick-walled and then walled-in again house with the thick, curved tiles of terra cotta that ran down its head like jazzed-up rivers of rufous hair (the one dominating note over that part of Trincomalee, as ever, the thunder of the waves of Eastern Bay in my ears) time and again Fort Frederick and Swami Rock bore into my vision, and I eagerly anticipated the next Sunday when I would be able to grub for some slight and precious evidence that the Sunken Temple bells still rang in that sea, and had once really existed.

We played games most evenings, or merely strolled on the lunar-

shaped white beach of Eastern Bay. It was on Sundays that my brothers and I, and my Hindu friend Suppiah when he visited us, made the longer trek to the Fort and to Swami Rock. Although we were a very close family, who worked and played together, to the extent of publishing rival weeklies with interweaving threads of interests and comment, I don't know to this day whether my brothers shared my thoughts on Swami Rock and Fort Frederick. The subject, being Hindu, was verboten, perhaps, and that was another mandala of furious clarity in my confusion. I had been brought up to be proud of my family's Hindu heritage which had been beseiged in 1505 and a few years later captured by the Portuguese. My ancestor and his five brothers, who were children, were taken to Goa in India to be educated in the Catholic tradition before their return to Ceylon. I was told that St Francis Xavier's correspondence about him is preserved in Lisbon, but I have never gone into the matter, seen any reference to it, nor bothered about it since my departure from Ceylon thirty years ago.

To share my secret thoughts on Swami Rock with my brothers may have puzzled them and made our life unreal since we were taught the falsity of Hinduism and distrust of things Hindu, at school, and they may not have thought as much as I did of the dualism at home, of accedence and philanthropic contribution to Christianity, counter-pointed with our Hindu mode of life, Hindu customs and close affinity with our Hindu relatives. I was told my paternal grandfather had Hinduised the Catholic church at my birthplace, Atchuvely, in several ways, introducing Hindu drummers and shenai players in ceremonials, for instance. To discuss these matters with them would have disturbed the spontaneity and flow of our young lives. And maybe, on the one hand, I never did discuss Swami Rock with them to preserve a flickering source of wonder and, on the other, elicit information

from my Hindu friend, Suppiah, to fan it to a revelation.

A quarter mile of red gravel road fringed with bombax malabaricum, flamboyante and rain-trees, past cottages, led us to the beach. At the road's end was a bathing club for Europeans from which, we were told, one member drowned each year. Opposite it, almost on the beach itself, was the low, squat Trincomalee Library with me as its only non-adult member. It had trellis-work of wood painted grey for the upper walls, and it was a marvellous experience to be inside with the sea breeze spanking through and the sun shining on the incandescent pages of books. The eyes of open windows at the back of the library stared at my friend Major Graham's wooden-hulled schooner riding at anchor, her belly full of foreign marvels. It was his houseboat where he lived year after year with his man, Murugesu, who often rowed me over in the ship's dinghy to borrow books from the Major's library. He had many books by G.A. Henty, of the Kitchener in Khartoum and With Clive in India sort, books on pirates and great explorers and had, surprising as it may seem since he was a Briton, perhaps he was a rebellious Scot! presented a set of Horatio Alger to the Boy Scouts' sanctum at school, all of which I hungrily devoured.

He had arrived in Trincomalee after the first world war and was mostly seen ashore in the mornings when he attended Mass to sit next to the Duke or King of Saxony, a somewhat mysterious figure who was in exile somewhere around Trincomalee. At this distance in time the warm and affectionate figure of the Major is very vague except that he was blonde and tall and wore white shorts, shirt and yachting cap, was stiff and straight, reticent, and had the peculiarity of never walking back to his seat after communion. With his eyes riveted on the officiating priest and chalice that contained the host, and palms pressed together in the Hindu custom of greeting, he backed his way to his seat, accurately and neatly, in a kind of naval strut

which I have only seen at state funerals. He had arrived in his schooner at Trincomalee after the first world war to stay except for one last journey in her to Scotland from which he did not return. He died on his journey back to Ceylon, somewhere around Suez, and I grieved for him and his individualist dream which, inchoately, the instinctive animal within me had perceived, even at my age. The vacancy left in my life by his death, even to this day, is something inexplicable. Was it the first death in a journey of one's own? Murugesu presented us with the Major's cavalryman's sword with which we played until it disappeared in yet another mystery which is so typical of childhood.

The Trincomalee Library was to our right as we entered the beach, beyond it Government Agent's Hill and, to the left, in the distance, Fort Frederick. In the center the open sea which stretched in a wide swathe to the South Pole without ever touching land, except Ceylon's. Once I was startled to see a long British cruiser, HMS Effingham or HMS Emerald, racing full steam ahead against a clear afternoon sky with her funnels belching the blackest clouds I have ever seen: keeping in mind all the incendiarism I had watched in war-torn London. She was firing all her guns, it seemed, and I could see six to eight great powerful flashes at a time... broadside. It was impressive and awesome. I knew every ship of Britain's East Indies Squadron when Trincomalee, not Singapore, was its base, including HMS Hood, the largest battleship in the world, which was sunk by the Japanese in World War II in that great holocaust which shocked Britain and her allies. That is, all except for HMS Rapidol which was the ugly duckling of the fleet. She was the tanker which fuelled the fleet before the great oil tanks in the jungles of China Bay were built by Mr Dickens (descendant of Charles Dickens and friend of my father) and she was painted a ghastly grey contrasting oddly with the sparkling

white of the rest of the fleet.

The boy scouts and cubs of the famed 1st Trincomalee Troop to which I belonged (as far as I know there was only one in Trincomalee) were often invited to the various ships of the fleet for tea and refreshments and we were shown the ship's innards and the working of the smaller guns as sailors polished the great big ones fore and aft. How the metal gleamed over extraordinarily well-scrubbed decks! I loved the ice cream. Our troop had won the King's medal for the island for five years in succession which meant we kept the silver cup and I don't imagine there was any dark brain-washing and colonial plot involved in presenting it to the boy scouts of this great naval base.

Admiral Thesiger often asked us to tea by the old banyan tree by Admiralty House. My brother once fell down from its smooth branches and was carried stunned into the house by the Admiral who managed to revive him. In return for the Navy's courtesies, which included invitations to soccer matches and boxing tournaments, we staged an annual play and variety entertainment for the Admiral and the fleet in which I took part and I once, voluntarily, repeated my ridiculous performance of singing Felix the Cat on board ship as return for some favour. As for the sailors, I made friends with three of them - Harry Frampton, Freeman and Gibbs of HMS Enterprise. My elder brother and I had met them one day walking along the harbour's edge, which is free of buildings along its entire front except for two jetties and a single 'boutique' which is the term used in Ceylon for a small cafe. As we strolled we swung bunches of palmyrah kilangu which fascinated the sailors.

'What is that you are eating?' Harry Frampton, the leader of the trio, asked, pointing to the kilangus, each of which was about a

foot long and more than an inch in diameter at the base.

My elder brother and I explained they were the boiled germinated plumules, or sprouts, of the palmyrah palm. We peeled off the brown fibrous husks of the taper-shaped, wax-colored sprouts, split them in halves and broke off sections for them. Harry Framton's face expanded in a smile as the savored the smooth, nutty flavor and texture, and that seemed to seal our friendship. We visited them a couple of times on board the Emerald where we entertained each other as best we could. Ever since then, over the years and from several cities of the world, I have often thought of getting in touch with the friends of my boyhood through the British Admiralty but, alas, I have not yet done so. I liked the flow of their names and I feel all three of them exist somewhere and remember us and the strange kilangus they once ate on the sunny shores of Ceylon.

My outgoing nature was attracted to the 'otherness' of the British and their way of life, their assurance, their sense of power, the delicate tints of a woman's lamplit arms, face and hair glimpsed through an open door or window or on the lawn in the well-groomed and lush, tropical garden at dinner with a lampshade of delicate color glowing over the dinner table in that langorous, easy, quiet and yet pregnant atmosphere which is typical of nights in Ceylon.

As we entered the perfumed beach of Dutch Bay, heavy with screwpine-smell and, underfoot, the thick bilobe leaved goatsfoot with indigo and white-trumpeted flowers for a soft carpet or pet-rabbit feed, my thoughts would bell high on the right over G.A.'s Hill. The cool, old, white-pillared, one-storey building on it was surrounded by beds of flaming canna and the most venerable banyan tree in Trincomalee with its multiple trunks, silent as a cathedral nave, stood brooding in front of it.

It was my ambition to become Government Agent one day and occupy that house and many were the excursions we made towards it, along a dangerous path on the sheer seaward side of the hill's armless shoulder, which had a fascinating, tiny trickle of water falling into a rock cup, and then on to a modest cave filled with subsided rock which was my reference point for the others in story books. But opposite it, more insistent than the puffball fantasies of G.A.'s Hill and the intriguing exterior spit and polish and orderliness of a foreign mode of life, more personal and powerful than the headlong cruiser with her winking guns, was the ancient thrusting of the tongue of land into the waters of Narayana, the Lord of the Waters, the flow and ebb of the expanding and contracting universe, creation and destruction, the cosmic rhythm of which the ancient temple of the Linga of Shiva was the symbol. The symbol (in the Hindu tradition in which construction and locale are inseparable and the particular but an undifferentiated part of all progressively larger units: man, man-god, god-creative energy, creative energy-substratum of creative energy, which is undifferentiated and without beginning, middle or end) was not the temple alone, but the whole terrain itself, as implied in the name Thiru-konar-malai, anglicized to Trincomalee, the port for which the notorious great iron ship of England, the largest ship in the world of those days, was built. Thiru means sacred, konar, Shiva, and malai hilly place from which names like Malaya, Malabar and Trincomalee are derived. The terrain of the Sacred Hill of Shiva was the symbol, now reduced to a boulder representing the yoni of the goddess, pierced by the granite pillar, the lingam of Shiva, the ying-yang in its more obvious representation. The lingam, planted in its square, leaf-shaped and other pedestal yonis, was placed in the sanctum sanctorum of Shiva temples which are

in the majority in India. Sometimes a simple mound of earth, an upright oval pebble or a stalagmite in the icy caves of the Himalayas, as at Badrinath, sufficed for worshippers. Although this was not the original lingam of the Temple, Brahmin priests had very cleverly preserved the meaning of the terrain in the colossal symbol of Swami Rock, fooling the European puritanism, ignorant of its meaning, which had ordered the naked arms and torsoes of the Kathakali (storytelling) dancers of Malabar covered in red flannel, and attempted to do the same with the naked breasts of our Rodiya girls in Ratnapura Province. (The story goes that the king's mischievous chef had served him roast monkey. The infuriated king had ordered him and his descendents thrust down a few social scales to the Rodiya caste whose people should henceforth forbear to wear clothes above their waists, which to my mind is a blessing, not a punishment in the tropics.) All this information was not, of course, available to me during my years in Trincomalee which were charged with the irrelevancy of Christianity to my own life, and that of my family, my intense involvement with the mystery of Swami Rock, and the search for some evidence, however slight, that Thirukonarmalai Temple was not a figment of our anti-colonial, defensive, or aggressive minds.

It is impossible for me to describe the perfect high that a Hindu temple with its site, its rituals and atmosphere gives me: the total involvement with all one's senses engaged, liberating, exhilarating, like a plate of very hot rice and curry (Ceylon has the hottest curries on the world), savoured with sweat pricking and flowing from the hair roots and forehead, psychedelic, round flavoured and universalizing in its intent and being... all individual flavours and feelings lost in a oneness, the long note in which all the flavours persist in an indescribable but deeply felt unity. The self,

water-cooled courtyards and jasmine which transported me to Atchuvely, my birthplace, and the Northern Province of Ceylon. Even though nowadays I have resolved the mystery of the Rock, the old wonder and uncertainty persist whenever I think of it, part of the ringing dawn of childhood which the mind is unwilling to discount or forget.

The bone-stark, low, T-shaped school building at Trincomalee, across the road from our house, was fleshed in cassia and casuarina trees, and two unnamed trees of small height with pale green leaves growing together which were its prominent sweet navel. The boys nervously plucked at it constantly, and ate the pale green leaves with questioning looks. They tasted leafy and sweet. Occupying the bottom third of the foot of the T, and adjoining the Boy Scout sanctum, was the vernacular school where the language of instruction was Tamil. The rest of it with English for the medium (we were fined one cent if we talked Tamil) had the lower classes from standards one to five on either side of the long hall, with the school certificate and the matriculation classes occupying the wings. A long aisle led to the principal's desk, the memory of which still fills me with foreboding.

If I dreaded that aisle leading to the Principal's desk down which many a boy was summoned to be reprimanded, I dreaded the maths teacher even more. I was not too good at arithmetic. And it seemed ominous to me that it was in his class I once fell and broke my arm. He had a youthful clear-skinned face, pendant like a waterfall, with a black moustache adorning extraordinarily sensual lips, and his long shapely limbs were encased in a flowing white verti which is five yards of cloth wrapped round the waist like a sari. Whenever he wished to punish a boy, he asked him to hold out a palm and then rapped it with the edge of a foot ruler. I had often been his victim and, as far as I remember, he was the only teacher who was such a

disciplinarian.

He made me feel very uncomfortable with his large, black, moist eyes, his coaxing, insinuating speech and the moist look of his mouth. There was something subterranean and pleading about him which terrified me. I had often felt that he wished to take me aside to have a private conversation and he had time and again suggested a visit to his house which I took pains to avoid or sneak past quickly.

As for the boys, we were a motley lot. Some wore shoes and boots and other sandals. The Moors, who are Mohammedans, wore colourful sarongs, which are known in America as Madras prints, with red fez and black tassel for headgear, while the Tamil Hindus preferred their 'national costume' which is the long verti, with or without a thin ornamental border of vermilion and yellow which matched the pottu or caste mark of sandalwood paste and vermilion on their foreheads. The boys from families which had to traffick with or work for the British (politicians and some businessmen excluded) dressed like the British in shirt, shorts and tie. These woollen-socked and heavy-booted boys considered themselves the 'in' people, a feeling that I myself have experienced, which accentuated the split nature of my personality oscillating between the European and non-European. I felt exhilarated and proud when my grandfather dressed in black coat, turban of scarlet and gold and foam of white verti playing over Arabian Nights' shoes took us out riding in the phaeton. He flicked the coiled whip and we bowled down the roads of Atchuvely which were limestone white when I was a boy, built of the limestone rock of the peninsula, crushed by the wheels of the bullock carts. My father and some members of the family dressed similarly on ceremonial occasions and holidays while others stuck stubbornly to their vertis and kurtaus (long Indian shirts).

The feelings of division, hostility, confusion, superiority and inferiority, and so on, evoked by clothes alone would be unfamiliar to a more homogeneously dressed people like the British or American, though there was a humdrum snobbism about them in the England I knew which was, however, free of the several implications intended by us. In Ceylon or India, the dress and the way it is worn indicates race, religion, sect, profession, caste and marital state. People wore Hindu or non-Hindu clothes in public and these too were apt to be changed abruptly. The most dramatic exhibition of the phenomenon happens daily on the Colombo-Talaimanaar Express. The passengers who board the night train en masse in Colombo, and are tightly packed in the compartments, are Tamils, mostly in European dress, on their way to the Jaffna peninsula. They are the most conservative and yet progressive people in Ceylon, Jaffna Tamils, Jaffnese, who consider themselves distinct from the Indian Tamils of Ceylon.

By daybreak the jungle has given way to the coral plains and salt estuaries of the North with groves of coconut and palmyrah, and the passengers have been transmogrified overnight, affecting a sartorial and personality change. The starched, constricting suits and shoes intended for the jungles or a cold climate have disappeared in an avalanche of silk vertis, kurtaus, and sandals, and limp bracelets of cleverly interlinked gold, flat as a watch band, dangle gracefully from wrists, the affectation of the dandies. Cigarettes have been routed by the concerted assault of the northern-grown Jaffna cheroot which is named after the Tamil word churutu... something rolled. The acrid fumes released have quickened and excited conversation, the former bilingualism drowned with the sole use of Tamil, the voices deafening and sing-song in the manner of farmers and villagers,

deliberately raised as a protest to present affronts to their individuality and sense of nationalism, with others trying to steer a sheepish middle course.

I felt the same stress and strain in my class at school. The obviously middle course boys were Sethukavaler, son of a government official in the kaccheri (town hall) and Brito whose family lived in Fort Frederick in a small house on top of soaring steps and a hillock which intrigued me.

Every stone and shard in Fort Frederick had an esoteric meaning for me and, from its age, I imagined the house was built by the Portuguese and may therefore incorporate parts of the fabric of Thirukonarmalai Temple. The other two boys who stood out in my class were Hindu Suppiah and the Moor, Mohammed, with the fez and tassel and sarong, whose father owned a general store in the bazaar and meat and fish market section of Trincomalee.

I often wandered there in the evenings fascinated by the brightly lit one-room shops of silks, chiffons, organdies, saris of gold and silver, a cascade of colour as the shopkeepers unrolled and heaped them for display on the floor. The scent of the new cloths was freshening and heady like the sachets of blotting paper some companies sent out.

Suppiah lived by the modern Hindu Temple, some distance beyond the bazaar, in what was the Hindu quarter, the quarter of mysteries, and invariably wore a pottu of sandalwood with a spot of vermilion in its center, in the middle of his forehead.

One Saturday, I paid him a visit on my own, an unusual mission for me since it was so far away. Like Swami Rock, and the houses of my Hindu relatives, his place had an aura of 'otherness' which fired my imagination. I expected to find some sign, some great, healing revelation there... perhaps in the pergola of jasmine that led to

the front door, which had the characteristic Hindu garland of mango leaves strung across it; perhaps in the side room inside the house, the worship and meditation room, where an oil lamp burned in front of a framed oleograph of Ganesha, the jolly, big-bellied son of Lord Shiva, the Supreme God. He is the most popular god in India and Ceylon who is invoked before journeys and any sort of undertaking. Two multi-wicked brassed lamps which were not in use stood on the floor on their tall pedestals flanking a polished chembu or engraved brass pot filled with a bouquet of yellow and vermilion flowers from the garden ringed with spears of mango leaves. This puja or worship room was dark like the innermost sanctum of Hindu temples, evoking the same sensations of the primeval and the secret, the centre of the earth with its brooding silence, as I imagined it at the time, the cave.

Suppiah was delighted to see me. "Did the temple really exist?" I could not help asking him. He believed it had, and that it now lay at the bottom of the ocean floor.

To complete the 'otherness' of the afternoon, Suppiah's mother sent the servant out to buy some Bengal-gram (ulunthu) doughnuts made fat with hot water and curds for tea, a delicacy of Brahmin teashops. Since we never had them at home (they are seldom made at home, I didn't know at the time) and a Hindu cousin of my father's also served these when we visited him, I've always associated them with Hindu households. Suppiah's house had ancient roots, undisturbed by the fortunes of the nation. In his mango grove lurked shadowy beings of the past. He could tell me much I wished to know.

After this visit, Suppiah came to our house frequently at weekends and joined us on our treks to Swami Rock and the miniature spring and the cave by Government Agent's Hill. We called at Admiralty House (the son of the caretaker was in our class) and Fort Ostenberg,

to visit the other boys and girls who had previously been at school with us in the Catholic Convent School and were looking forward to 'higher' education in England. (At age five it was considered too dangerous for the boys to mix with girls - I was already playing hide and seek in the hibiscus bushes with an English girl from Fort Ostenberg - and so we were transferred to one of the all-male schools.) We wandered through the salt estuaries and their banks thick with salty portulaca, and through the Royal Navy's rifle range into the thick jungle where we opened our picnic baskets. It was one of my first close friendships.

Suppiah and I were soon roaming together all over the town's esplanade which stretched from near our house to the bazaar and Fort Frederick. It was ringed with tulip trees whose dry fruits made excellent spinning tops. We watched the soccer games, the Royal Navy vs. Trincomalee, our school vs. the rest and the sailors drilling in the broiling sun. Once we saw one of the sailors fall down dead with sunstroke. We thus became involved and we attended his funeral.

We roamed over the grounds of the Trincomalee Club and the Rest House looking for fragments of the sunken temple. We looked in the grounds of the Catholic Convent adjoining the esplanade. A large boulder stood there under a temple-tree (plumeria acutifolia) on which I used to sit and listen to the breakers, the crisp sea breeze carving my face. It must have come from the rocky site of the temple, and search as I might for an ancient inscription, all it showed were the incisions and scribblings made on it by the children. We stood in a semi-circle round it for our singing lessons and the words of the songs I learned, mixed with the sea breeze, still hum in my ears.

Poor Mary is a-weeping, is a-weeping, is a-weeping
Poor Mary is a-weeping by the side of the sea.
I'm weeping for my true love, my true love, my true love
I'm weeping for my true love by the side of the sea.

Another focus of our search was at the base of the towering and venerable raintree by the cool Rest House since shrines for worship are sometimes built at the base of such trees, besides the bo, banyan and neem. What we found were irridescent beetles which we kept alive in matchboxes, with raintree leaves, to no purpose. The most intriguing spot was the manhole cover on the seaward fringe of the esplanade. Rumour said it was the exit from a secret tunnel from the Fort. Workmen had once entered it and discovered colonies of snakes.

One Sunday, Suppiah and my brothers were at one of our favourite pastimes, jumping down to the beach from the sea wall that buttressed the road and entrance to the Fort, when he gave me a tiny bronze statuette of Ganesha, the big-bellied elephant-faced god.

"I thought you might like to have it. My grandmother gave it to me long ago," he said.

The image was passed from hand to hand and Suppiah told us the story of how Shiva's son came by his elephant head. His wife was so proud of his beauty when he was born that she asked the evil planet, Saturn, to admire him.

'Don't show him to me,' warned the planet. 'You know I destroy everything I look at.'

But the proud mother, wife of Shiva, the supreme god, wouldn't listen.

'Look!' she said, unveiling the child's head, and it was instantly consumed.

The distraught mother bore his limp body to Lord Shiva.

'Go into the jungle,' Shiva ordered his attendants. 'Hurry!

Bring me the head of the first animal you meet.'

The first animal they found was a baby elephant. They cut its head off and hurried back with it, and Shiva attached it to his son's body. That is how the much-loved and jolly Indian god, with the elephant's small eyes, happens to be elephant-headed.

Suppiah's gift was indeed a treasure. It was the first time I had had the image of a Hindu god all to myself and I did not look for fragments of Hindu sculpture in the walls of the Fort that day, nor in the rusting gun emplacements and ruined houses, and the jungly patches within the Fort. I had a piece of sculpture that was all my own, and it was burning a hole in the pocket of my shorts.

The sky was a blaze of colour that evening at Swami Rock as the officiating priest at the furthermost end of the dangerous crag first purified himself with water poured from a delicate brass lota. He seemed as ancient as the earth, and the granite in the ocean below, with a sinuous string of large rastrakuta seeds round his neck. More and more worshippers arrived, as scantily clad as he, bearing libations of water or milk in brown earthenware chatties, and offerings of coconuts, coconut flowers, jasmine, oleander, betel leaves, money, bunches of bananas, rice. Surya, the Sun God, was closing his opaline eyes, bathing Trincomalee with his flood of blessing. The priest spoke to him in the ancient tongue, with the people responding. It seemed the earth rumbled, and the stars came out to watch. Chanting more fervently, he poured water and milk on the colossal lingam and then cast the people's gifts into the waters of Narayana from the giddy heights, the fruits of the earth unto the Giver, for Narayana (Vishnu) and Brahma of the Aryan Brahmins are but Shiva (Goodness) the most ancient pre-Aryan god of the Indians, as are graphically incised on the stone lingams of Ceylon. He

kindled Agni, the God of Fire, on the rock, and held aloft a burning brand as the people threw up their arms heavenward. The Sun's eyes were closed and the priest covered the earth with gossamer incense from the brass censer he swung high over his head, binding everything present, and not present, into a close unity. The incense. The love-in of universals at Swami Rock.

Then he descended from the crag and with the ashes of Agni made the sign of Shiva on each worshipper's forehead. And I had a feeling that at least a part of the puja (holy mass) was intended for the god in my pocket. I was not far wrong since, as I learned in later years, sculptures of Shiva and his wife Parvati, in the temples, often included his sons Ganesh and Subramanya, the God of War, in one sweeping concept.

I was proud of my possession when I got home, and put him on display to my parents who smiled indulgently.

'I must take you to Manipay Hindu Temple. My grandfather was a trustee,' my father said. I was pleased, but the dualism of my family, always impenetrable, was, as usual, perplexing to me.

But I owned Ganesha for one day only. I had him in my school satchel on my desk. Unfortunately for Ganesha and me, it was during theperiod of the maths teacher. As he passed down the rows of desks, foot rule in hand, peering at our work papers and making us highly nervous, he spotted Ganesha.

'What is this?' he roared, snatching him up.

The whites of his moist eyes which were usually red, through over-indulgence in arrack, I thought, and demons had red eyes, looked fearsome as they rolled in their sockets. Seized by powerful emotions, his eyes sparked more fiercely than usual.

'I am confiscating this,' he shouted, 'and I'll report you to the Principal.'

century poet, Varotheiyan, the temple had been built by a Tamil king from the Coromandel coast in the year 512 of the Kali, or fourth and final, Age of the present cycle of evolution and dissolution of our universe, or BC 2588. Rev. James Cartman in his 1957 book Hinduism in Ceylon comments on this: 'The date BC 2588 is most doubtful, but the reference to the famous temple is genuine. This famous temple, known as the temple of a thousand columns, once stood 400 feet above sea level upon the Swami Rock which is situated in Fort Frederick. This Rock, about which many strange legends are told, has long been a place of pilgrimage.' I also learned from Rev. Carter's book that two stones from the original fabric of the temple are to be seen on either side of the main entrance to the Fort. On them are carved the twin fish emblem of an Indian king who invaded Ceylon in recent times and claims to have planted his flag in Trincomalee. These two happenings relieved me of one of the nagging doubts involving the genuineness and validity of my Ceylonese heritage.

Carter?

As for our not eating enough meat, and rice being debilitating, I had satisfactorily solved the problem for myself while still at school. The most celebrated dinner of the Dutch in Indonesia (now transported to gourmet restaurants in Amsterdam) was rijstaffel, or rice table, which is rice with several curries, curry being a misnomer since grilled sausages, or bacon or meat, cut bite-size, would also be curries for us. It was rijstaffel, sanctified by a foreign name, that sustained us in Ceylon, according to tastes and needs created by our climate, and the Dutch did not err in their preference. I remembered that at my grandmother's house, in Atchuvely, we had the inevitable thirty-six dishes to choose from, on Sundays. Some of them were only relishes of the shrimp and eggplant, fish blachang, or mango chutney sort, but there was no lack in the variety of cooked

meats, seafood, fruits, flowers, vegetables, and grains of all kinds.

Impressed with this discovery, I once wrote an article for The Ceylon Observer, whereupon a lady of Dutch descent wrote to say she had had more than a hundred dishes to cope with when she was a little girl. I think her name was van Dort, and she was well over a hundred years old. It was compliment enough for our cuisine which is as subtle and potent, in every way, for our climate, as Indian music.

As for my double self, in today's world of raga rock and yoga, flowers and incense, and flower power, it would be reasonable to assume that they have merged.

I cannot say so since, in many a situation, I find a Western echo in an eastern setting attractive. I am content to be double, at least, nowadays, since I've actually always wanted to be the sound in the holy Brahmin's conch.

Tambimuttu

THE MAN WITH THE EVIL EYE

The bountiful paddy crop which should have been ready for reaping in February was rotting in the fields. The storms and floods of the North-East monsoon, particularly severe that year, had laid it waste. The farmers of Atchuvely, in Ceylon, were troubled, and the village was full of rumours.

"Raman said he thought the Monmari (August-February) crop should be good this year, and look what has happened!" I heard Farmer Chellar tell the others. He was a sort of village elder among them, being properous, and in fact older than most. His red eyes, flushed with toddy, looked dangerous over his fillet-of-fish cheeks. Even his capacious belly, attached to his fat legs like a child's, usually so comfortable-seeming in its nakedness, looked dangerous now scored with vigorous black hair. The other farmers who had gathered under the tamarind tree by the junction, their usual meeting place in the evenings, talked among themselves excitedly. The seller of sweet-meats under the tree was the only person who seemed unaffected, since trade was as usual for him.

"My child had the measles last year and it was all due to him!" the young athletic-looing Farmer Kaspar almost shouted, as village people shout when they are talking, holding on with both his hands to his white shawl which hung toga-wise across his shoulder, revealing patches of nut-brown skin. "Raman is dangerous," he said. "We will have to make him leave! The place is not healthy with him here!"

"Don't be crazy! He has as much right to live in Atchuvely as

we have!" shouted the angry voice of Farmer Nesan, although he was not angry. When village voices were rhetorical they always sounded angry to me.

"Raman is coming. I'm going home," said Farmer Chellar shuffling his sandals along the limestone road. He spat out some red betel-chew explosively into the ditch.

When Raman, who was cursed with the Evil Eye, arrived, the farmers exchanged ~~veiled~~ quick, veiled glances as they usually did when Raman praised something, or looked approvingly at anything that had caught his fancy. The poor man suffered from the Evil Tongue as well. If he praised a beautiful child it was bound to sicken, or if he looked approvingly at a crop it was bound to wither. Whereas in the other villages the one with the evil eye was a woman (and every village had one) our village had been cursed with a male whose influence was potently, therefore more powerful. ~~To make matters worse, the man was said to have not only the Evil Eye, but the Evil Tongue as well.~~ Correspondingly So every farmer had put up a pole in the middle of his field and balanced a pot with white lime marks on top it to counteract it ~~them~~. Since the betel vines were especially susceptible, being so feminine and delicate, those farmers who could lay their hands on one for a charm had hung an ox's skull near by ~~for a charm~~.

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I remembered the evening ~~some months~~ three years back when my brother Rutnam and I were walking down the road where Raman lived. Raman was sitting on the nicely carved oblong stone opposite his house where he often sat in the evenings, chewing his betel and tobacco, and drinking in the air that had been cooled by his wife sprinkling water on the heated road and compound. We averted our eyes and hurried on. But he called out our names, so we had to stop.

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When Rutnam and I woke up next morning, the ayah gave us our morning baths, and painted the black pottu or beauty-spot on the forehead with more than usual care. They were meant to avert the evil eye and all the children were made to wear it, whether they were Hindu or Christian.

"Now remember to slip back into the house if you see Raman!" she warned. The mothers and ayahs ordered the children inside the house if Raman came up the road. But he never seemed to notice

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However, the childhood impression persisted in the back of my mind, that the evil tongue and the evil eye could bring harm. I had seen visitors refraining from praising children in case, ~~unwittingly~~, they had the evil eye unwittingly; and when strangers admired a child, the womenfolk had looked troubled. I had watched 'lime cutting' ceremonies in which the exorcist sliced a hundred limes on the forehead of a person cursed with the evil eye, to drive it away with special incantations, and the sprinkling of virgin water from a new spring dug secretly at night. All these things had left an impression on my unreasoning mind. So in spite of my retort to the ayah I felt vaguely troubled that morning.

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Raman's house since the farmers have threatened him with violence. What are we going to do?"

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"He thinks someone is trying to harm him."

"Tell Chellar and Kaspar I would like to see them," said grandfather.

Chellar and Kaspar called after their lunch just as grandfather was thinking of his siesta. They looked embarrassed, hung their heads down and twiddled their fingers. They sat down on the floor in front of grandfather.

"Look here Chellar and Kaspar," grandfather said, "Raman has as much right to farm in Atchuvely as you have. He was born here and so was his father. Now be good men and don't create any trouble for him."

"We have lost our crops, sir, and that is a serious matter. As long as he is here we will have ill-luck. What are we to do?"

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When we neared the junction we found that a large crowd had assembled. They were all excited and the vendor of sweetmeats under the tamarind tree was doing a brisk trade serving out portions of the roast gram, lentil-doughnuts with shrimps, boiled manihot and curry relish, and the other delicacies spread out on the trestle lit with a naked carbide flame.

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LAST PAGE MISSING

THE MAN WITH THE EVIL EYE

The bountiful paddy crop which should have been ready for reaping in February was rotting in the fields. The storms and floods of the North-East monsoon, particularly severe that year, had laid it waste. The farmers of Atchuvely, in Ceylon, were troubled, and the village was full of rumours.

"Raman said he thought the Monmari (August-February) crop should be good this year, and look what has happened!" I heard farmer Chellar tell the others. He was a sort of village elder among them, being properous, and in fact older than most. His red eyes, flushed with toddy, looked dangerous over his fillet-of-fish cheeks. Even his capacious belly, attached to his fat legs like a child's, usually so comfortable-seeming in its nakedness, looked dangerous now scored with vigorous black hair. The other farmers who had gathered under the tamarind tree by the junction, their usual meeting place in the evenings, talked among themselves excitedly. The seller of sweet-meats under the tree was the only person who seemed unaffected, since trade was as usual. ~~Less him.~~

"My child had the measles last year and it was all due to him!" the young athletic-looing farmer Kaspar almost shouted, as village people shout when they are talking, holding on with both his hands to his white shawl which hung toga-wise across his shoulder, revealing patches of nut-brown skin. "Raman is dangerous," he said. "We will have to make him leave! The place is not healthy with him here!"

"Don't be crazy! He has as much right to live in Atchuvely as

we have!" shouted the angry voice of Farmer Nesan, although he was not angry. When village voices were rhetorical they always sounded angry to me.

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And then one morning he came to see us. His bullock cart stood

outside laden with his belongings, with his wife sitting on the front plank, a patient, still figure. He told us he had come to wish us goodbye. He was going away to Manmar, a hundred miles away, to settle down with a cousin. He had rented out his farm to Nesan.

Grandfather stared at him in a strange way, and then he nodded his head. Even his wisdom could see no other way out for Raman.

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THE MOST USEFUL TREE ON THE ISLAND

by Tambimuttu

When my four brothers and I boarded the train at Colombo in November 1925 we were going as usual for our vacation at Atchuvely village at the extreme end of the island. I was nearing ten at the time. The great northern express roared through the night along the longest stretch of railroad in Ceylon. Sleepy hamlets nestling under the palms signalled with their kerosene and coconut oil lamps. We passed through the ruined city of Anuradhapura where great kings had ruled for 993 years and which had once been large, as large as modern London. The jungle poured over the tracks on either side. There were other lost cities in the wilderness, Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa, forever drowned in the merciless jungle tide. The searchlight and the sparks from the wood-fired engine, as well as the petromax lamps of wayside stations, combined to give a ghostly aspect to everything we saw. When we woke up after an eerie night in the compartment we had to ourselves, our mood had changed. We felt exhilarated. The morning sun lit up the coral plains, the salt lagoons and the estuaries. There was a salt tang to the white air. The strangely fronded palmyrah palm characteristic of these parts jostled with coconut and arecanut palms among the broad fields of tobacco.

"We should be at Chunnakam soon. Grandfather-with-the-Beard should meet us with the car," brother Rutnam remarked checking the luggage. He was the eldest, a year older than me.

"And The Tree Climber?" Singham asked. He was a year younger.

"No. No. Not Velu. We'll call at his cottage this evening. But we can buy some 'king coconuts' at Jaffna Station."

"As good as Velu's coconuts?" Singham asked.

"Of course not! Velu's trees and our trees are special. That is why he loves them so much. You can't buy coconuts like that in the market."

"Our trees are special only because The Tree Climber looks after them," I said. "He thinks they all belong to him!"

"And so they do I suppose!" Singham interrupted. "After all he collects one nut in every ten for plucking them! He owns one-tenth of each and every tree!"

Everyone laughed at that. Owning part of a tree reminded us of what Velu told us year after year. The coconut tree was so useful that a man Velu knew was proud he owned half a tree!

"I read in Mrs Heber's Journal that a man advertised the 154th part of a tree for sale!" Rutnam added.

"Come on let's see who can think of more uses!" Singham said. It was a favorite game of ours to recite in turn the hundred and one uses of the coconut tree. So as the train sped on towards Chunnakam (where we alighted for Atchuvely) we played the game Velu, The Tree Climber had taught us. There were so many uses, we could never remember them all. Owning coconut trees as Velu had told us, was like having a cow, a field of flax, an aerated water factory, a vineyard, a forest of timber, a haystack for thatch, a compost heap of manure, sacks of feed for cattle and poultry, a field of sugar cane, a field of ground nuts, and many other things besides! It was Ceylon's 'Tree of Life' providing everything

from butter and milk and alcohol to the very cottages themselves which were almost completely vegetable. It gave us sugar, coir-products, palm wine, oil and many other things exciting to remember in a game.

"It is the most useful tree in the world!" Velu told us year after year. I therefore thought of the coconut as a 'good' tree. (We believe in the existence of 'good' trees like the bo and 'evil' trees like the neem). It had to be 'good' being so useful!

When we arrived at Grandfather-with-the-Beard's estate, The Tree Climber was the first person we called on. Towards evening we set out for his cottage set at the edge of the estate accompanied by Great-Grandfather -with-the-Ear-Blobs -- so called because of his heavy earrings. Great-grandfather wished to tell him that for the next two months he would need a constant supply of the 'king coconuts' that are specially grown for drinking, while my brothers and I wished to see our friend Velu who was a big part of our holidays.

Full of expectancy we pushed open Velu's gate of thatch set in the thatch fence. With our toes we felt the white sand of his path, fine as granulated sugar.

His cottage of bright red adobe beyond the kitchen gardan was rather more spacious than his neighbours'. The brown palm thatch of attractive lozenge design ended at the eaves in rapier-like projections of leaf-ends which had not been tucked in neatly, as in the more fashionable households. The rain water dripped off the points making tiny holes in the ground. To the right of his cottage stood an open shed. It housed his cow and a

couple of goats. And all round were his jack and mango trees, and some banana and pineapple.

His kitchen garden was one of the neatest in Atchuvely. Snake-gourds, a yard long, hung green and silver from their frames, with tiles tied to the ends to aid their stretching among the bitter-gourds and peas. Aubergenes, tomato and okkra plants were fastened with banana cord to upright sticks. The betel and aerial yam climbed up the poles. There were beds of manihot, king yam, palmyrah sprouts and sweet potato. The monstrous ash gourds and pumpkins sat on the ground as if they owned the place.

About twenty-five coconut palms radiated from his well in the furthermost corner. Villagers say that a man lacks nothing if he owns half a dozen coconut trees, a jack tree, a cow and a share in a paddy field. By these standards Velu was comfortably off, which indeed he was.

Velu's wife was the first one to notice our arrival. A small, grey-haired woman in a saree without a blouse she was busy cooking in the kitchen, an adobe and thatch structure open in front like a cave.

"Velu. Velu-o-o-o-o," her small voice quavered.

He was at a neighbour's. He knew from her shout something special was on, so he arrived looking breathless, but still self-possessed. His face, lively with grey stubble, broke into a ready smile as soon as he saw us. It looked as if he had been celebrating drinking toddy.

"Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" he chuckled, "so you have returned to Atchuvely to taste the 'king coconuts'! Welcome little kings! My eyes feel young again!"

Hiw wife and daughter brought chairs out into the open. We were entreated to sit even though we had called only for a moment. His farmer son, the eldest, raided the store-room for some delicacy he could give us, while the younger one stood by grinning shyly. He was a mischievous one, that one, although he was only nine.

"Hullo, Gundu!" I said looking at him suspiciously, as he shifted from foot to foot with his hands folded behind him.

"Going to climb The Tree this time?" he asked with a superior air. Gundu was nearly as expert at climbing trees as his father, though we had tried and couldn't. The inflection of his voice seemed to imply trees were really human.

"Who wants to climb trees?" I replied hotly, as if I didn't care. But the cunning devil knew I did.

"You must have a drink now!" Velu said.

"No, not now!" brother Rutnam replied for us as the eldest. It is polite to refuse a drink.

That was only a formality since nothing could stop Velu from giving us a drink from the special 'king coconuts' beside his cottage. He tucked up his verti garment between his legs, and nimbly climbed one of his three special trees, ninety feet high. Their nuts were a beautiful coral pink underneath, when the stalk cap was removed, and all the way through when sliced, which is unique in Ceylon in all our experience.

He lopped off the green heads with strokes of his pruning knife, almost with affection. Then he cut neat wedge shapes or round holes in their pink crowns, and the nectar came fizzing up like a bubbly wine.

We had our first taste of country grown coconut nectar for several months.

Velu's wife and his farmer son now pressed their attentions on us. They had their own gifts to give away -- king yams, boiled palmyrah sprouts, coconut candy. They were firmly thrust on us. Velu's son was deferential, but his wife was authoritarian, as Ceylon women are in the matter of hospitality.

"Why do you say you don't want?" she said. "It's <u>good</u> for you!" And that seemed to clinch the matter.

After our visit, Velu arrived every morning as the sun shone yellow directly on to our courtyard, with toddy he had drawn overnight from a tree for great-grandfather, and young coconuts for us. But long before that we hunted for him the the palm groves.

He was easy to locate. The knock-knock of his toddy-tapping sounded peacefully through the groves like the beat of nature's clock, as he cut the flower stocks eighty feet and more from the ground, and bruised them with salt and spices. Velu was lost in the sea of green above while he tied the terra-cotta pots to the flower stocks, and the palm wine flowed swiftly into them between the shivering leaves glinting light and dark in the morning sun. By evening they would be brimming. Sometimes the pre-monsoon winds whipped up the leaves and they clashed like swords and serpents. The palm trees swayed as he floated dangerously in the green sea. But I knew Velu was secure up there. He was safe with the trees since they were 'good'.

One morning I felt disturbed since Velu's wife called the trees 'evil'. She came to the groves, slightly bent, and her sable eyes darting around as if she expected to see a snake or an iguana. "Gundo! Gundu!" she shouted.

Gundu was of course hiding up a palm tree.

She looked at us suspiciously. "Little brothers, do you know where Gundu is?"

Before we could reply Velu had come down his tree. "What do you want with him?" he asked, looking mischievous like a schoolboy.

"I want him to go to the Junction Shop," she replied. And then Gundu let loose a shower of nuts from the tree top.

Her temper flared up at that and she shouted so the whole of Atchuvely could hear. "Shielding that wretched boy! And always away from his books! You and your evil trees! You spoil him, and soon he will not be fit to lift a flea off a cow's tail. You and your evil trees. Oh I wish I were dead." She went back the way she had come, still shouting, with her mission unaccomplished. Gundu merely grinned. "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" Velu's stomach shook. Then he patted the boy's head and walked off, quite sure of himself, to go on with his work. It seemed as if he had conspired to keep Gundu in the palm groves with him, with very little for him to do except follow his father around.

"Why does she call the coconut trees evil?" I asked brother Rutnam.

"Who knows, they may be," he said, and wrinkled his boyw. But I knew they couldn't possibly be.

For Velu had filled the groves with childhood magic for me. "These are the best 'fighting trees'," he told us proudly, pointing them out. They grew the nuts with extra thick shells for the 'coconut splitting' contests in which Velu took part.

During these games, the bowler of the opposing team threw a nut as hard as he could, while Velu banged it with the one in his hand.

He was 'out' if his coconut split or if he didn't split the other, and I felt sorry then. In some villages the holy water from split coconuts is immediately collected in a large pot and taken in procession at the conclusion of the games through the surrounding villages with cries of "Hoya" (Cheer). The coconut water is wholesome and goodly and is thought to charm away epidemics.

One day Velu told us "There is a bee-hive ready to take down on that tree!" My brothers and I were excited and impatient for the rest of that day.

We accompanied him and his farmer son to the palm groves after dark and Velu climbed up. We couldn't see clearly what he was doing. The top of the tree seemed to have caught fire. (He had set fire to coir fibre and was waving it around to smoke the bees.) Gold and rose sparks flew among the leaves and cascaded down. It looked beautiful as well as ominous. It looked dangerous. The tree seemed to be angry, spitting fire and smoke like a dragon. But Velu came down soon, as cheerful as ever, with the waxy comb which contained several bottles of honey.

He was specially fond of some trees. It was his husbandry for thirty-nine years, from his fifteenth year onwards, that had made them grow. "This tree is one of the best bearers, just look at those nuts!" he said proudly. One day he thought a tree was dangerous. "We will have to bring it down. I feel it's a mercy it was my grandfather and not I who planted it!" So Velu and his farmer son brought thick coir ropes and tied the tree up like a mast. Velu swung his axe above its base and the sad old tree came crashing down with its balding crown and wintry

fruit. Then he cut out the enormous butter-colored cabbage in the tree's heart. It tasted delicious, like a cross between almonds and lettuce, and the surplus was pickled away. The coconut palm's 'lettuce' is the rarest in the world, something you taste only once or twice in a lifetime. It had taken nearly a hundred years before we could have it, but it was worth the waiting.

The trees were like 'friends' to Velu. "Do you know the coconut won't grow away from the sound of human voices or the sea?" he told us. It is something all Ceylon villagers believe, so we raised our voices as we went through the groves, and the trees listened.

We had fine days at Atchuvely on that holiday. The morning and evening sun was kindly and we felt exhilarated by it. It was that gentle kind of sunlight which transforms everything it lies on into something young and glowing — kittenish. Then one evening near the end of our holidays, before the break of the north-east monsoon, the clouds shut off the sun. It got dark and ominous in the mango and palm groves, and the cyclone struck us.

When a cyclone strikes, the dust and parched mango leaves rise from the ground in whirling eddies, and the forest of trees groan. The coconut stems bend like Rama's bow, in the epic, under the furious onslaught, their leaves chattering and hissing excitedly. Above the storm we hear the thud of the great leaves falling, and the nuts dropping to the ground. Suddenly the heavens open and the torrents falls in solid sheets with frightening violence. The water slips down the gutters and pipes, screeching, drowning conversation. At such times the village is an

neighbours were silent and downcast as if a great personal calamity had struck them. Gundu was talking wildly to his father as they carried the stretcher to a car.

Velu recognized us by the light of the coconut flares and smiled. "It was the tree," he said wearily, "but don't worry. I will be coming back soon to look after the groves."

"Yes Velu," great-grandfather said who was visibly moved. He had known him since he was a child.

My brothers and I visited Velu the next day at Manipay Hospital, ten miles away, which was staffed with American and Ceylonese doctors. Great-grandfather accompanied us. The place was cool and spotless with white beds, and nurses in white sarees. Velu was unconscious in his room and we couldn't talk to him. I gave the nurse the double-jasmines we had gathered for him in our garden at Atchuvely to place in his room.

We spent the night with relatives in Manipay awaiting news of Velu. Before the next morning's sun rose we heard he was dead and we returned with his body to Atchuvely.

The drummers drummed that day and the funeral horns blew as the women of Atchuvely mourned ceremoniously for Velu. Some stood in parrallel lines and others sat in circles. Each one made up a couplet in verse about the dead man's virtues, his actions and the incidents in his life they remembered with affection. They chanted them in turn and wailed together for a refrain. Someone cursed the coconut tree that had fallen down and I felt like doing so too, though it would have been improper for me to say things out loud like the women. Men did not mourn like that. The mourning went on all day. My brothers and I stole into the thatch pavilion

THE TREE CLIMBER

Men are the victims of what they love most. At least when I was a boy I thought so, because of what happened to Velu, the Tree Climber.

Almost from childhood, Velu had spent his working days in the coconut groves of Grandfather-with-the-Beard's estate, at Atchuvely village, in Ceylon. According to old custom, he received ten nuts for every hundred he plucked. We lived with our parents in Colombo, where we went to school, but spent our long school vacations at Atchuvely. On these holidays my five brothers and I often looked for Velu in the groves, and found him busy with his many tasks, tapping the coconut trees for toddy in the off season--when the palmyra palms, which give the better toddy, can't be tapped--bringing down the brown old leaves for thatch, or supervising the drying of the nuts for copra, which is one of our chief exports. Coconuts provide the easiest crop in the world, as far as I know, as well as the most generous. With occasional help in the crop periods, which came every two months, a man like Velu tended two hundred acres of them. Sometimes we found him planting new trees. The seeds were germinated for several months in the water of a disused well and planted in holes three feet deep, with some lime to sweeten the soil and some sea salt for the trees to feed on.

Velu carefully fenced the plants around with thatch to keep away the squirrels, porcupines, rats, and flying foxes. He weeded and watered them occasionally, watching out for the larvae that feed on the young leaves, for termites, and the destructive coco beetle. Once the plants were firmly rooted, he gave them little more attention. They bore their first crop at eight years. Velu had an extraordinary feeling of regard and affection for the trees he tended, and this he instilled in me and my brothers. And there was also the wonder and romance of the groves, for they were a world in which many exciting things happened.

When we arrived at Grandfather's estate in 1922 to spend the long Christmas vacation, we made our first call on Velu. We arrived at his cottage toward sunset, accompanied by Great-Grandfather-with-the-Ear-Bobs, so called because he wore heavy earrings. Great-Grandfather wished to tell Velu that for the next six weeks he would need a daily supply of king coconuts, which are grown specially for drinking.

Velu's cottage of bright-red adobe and fawn-colored palm thatch, although typical of the village, was rather more spacious than his neighbors'. Like most of the other cottages in Atchuvely, it was fenced around with palmyra or coconut thatch, with a high gate of the same material opening onto a white-sanded path. To its right stood an open shed that housed his cow and pair of goats, and to its left the kitchen, an adobe-and-thatch structure open in front like a cave. All around were his jak and mango trees, and some bananas and pineapples. In front was his kitchen garden, one of the neatest in Atchuvely. Snake gourds a yard long hung green and silver from their frames, with tiles tied to the ends to aid their stretching among the bitter gourds and peas. Eggplants, tomato vines, and okra plants were fastened with banana cord to upright sticks. The betel and the aerial yam climbed up poles. The fat ash gourds and pumpkins sat on the red earth between the large, deeply lobed leaves.

About a hundred coconut trees radiated from Velu's well in the furthermore corner. Villagers say that a man lacks nothing if he owns half a dozen coconuts, a jak tree (whose monstrous fruit, growing by the shortest of stalks from the main trunk itself, weighs anything up to a hundred pounds), a cow, and a share in a paddy field. By these standards Velu was comfortably off.

Velu's wife was the first to notice our arrival. A small, delicately made woman in a sari without a blouse, she was busy in the kitchen with her pots and curry bowls of smoke-blackened terra cotta. Women of her caste did not wear blouses, as others did, but simply threw the ends of their saris over their left shoulders. The evening fires were blazing cheerfully in the hearth, a series of horseshoe-shaped structures of clay at the far end. The scene inside--with stacked pots hanging from the roof in fiber cradles and all manner of kitchen utensils neatly hung in patterned palm-fiber holders on the wall--was mysterious, ritualistic and self-contained, a world apart, a village woman's world.

"Velu! Velo-o-o!" his wife called. Velu was at a neighbor's. He knew from her shout something special was on, so he arrived looking breathless. His lively face, rough with gray stubble, broke into a smile as soon as he saw us. As a mark of respect, he took off the shawl hanging on his shoulder and wound it up and tied it around his waist. Though he was fifty-one, he had a young man's cheerful, unlined face and characteristic Indian lips, soft and bow-shaped. It was a typical villager's face, a mixture of strength and that gentleness which travelers, perhaps romantically, have referred to as a flower-like quality. It looked as if he had been celebrating, drinking toddy.

"Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" Velu chuckled. "So you have returned to Achuvely to taste the king coconuts! Welcome, little kings! My eyes feel young again!"

His daughter, a pretty girl of sixteen, brought chairs out into the open. We were entreated to sit even though we had called only for a moment. His tall, brown-limbed farmer son, the elder one, with just the <u>verti</u> or white nether garment wound around his middle so that his beautifully molded

arms and chest showed to advantage over the narrow waist, was sent to the storeroom to get some king yams or palmyra sprouts to present to the visitors. The younger son, Gundu, stood by, grinning shyly. He had a luxuriant, unruly mop of hair on top of a clear-skinned fair face--a marked contrast to his nut-brown brother's. He was nine years old and very mischievous.

"Hullo, Gundu," I said looking at him suspiciously, as he shifted from foot to foot, with his hands clasped behind him.

"Going to climb The Tree this time?" he questioned with a superior air, bobbing his head up and down for emphasis. Gundu was nearly as expert at climbing trees as his father, though we had tried and could not climb at all.

"Who wants to climb trees?" I replied hotly, as if I didn't care, but the cunning devil knew I did.

"You must have a drink now?" Velu said urgently.

"No, not now," my brother Rutnam replied for us. We all knew that it is polite to refuse a drink.

That was only a formality, since nothing could stop Velu from giving us a drink from the special king coconuts which grew beside his cottage. He tucked up his spotlessly white <u>verti</u> between his legs and climbed the tallest of the three special trees, about ninety feet high, which was his favorite. When the stalk cap was removed, the nuts of these trees were a beautiful coral underneath, and all the way through when sliced, which made them unique in all our experience.

Almost with affection, Velu lopped off their green heads with quick strokes of his broad, heavy sickle-shaped knife. Then he cut wedge shapes

This seemed ridiculous to us, since we drank his toddy. (In less orthodox Colombo, caste barriers were almost nonexistent, except on the important question of marriage.)

Long before Velu's morning visit, we would hunt for him in the palm groves. He was easy to locate. The knock-knock of his toddy tapping sounded through the groves like the beat of a clock as he cut the flower stalks eighty feet and more from the ground and bruised them with salt and spices. Velu was lost in the sea of green above while he tied the terra-cotta pots to the cut buds and the palm wine flowed into them between leaves glinting in the morning sun.

Sometimes the pre-monsoon winds whipped up the leaves and they clashed like swords or serpents. The palm trees swayed as he floated dangerously in the green sea. Groaning, they swept an awesome arc in the darkening sky. They looked dangerous at such times--just as on that day Velu had told us, "There is a beehive ready to take down on that tree."

After dark that evening we went with him and his farmer son to the palm groves. Velu climbed up and we couldn't see clearly what he was doing. The top of the tree seemed to have caught fire. He had set fire to a hank of coconut fiber and was waving it around to smoke out the bees. Sparks flew among the leaves and rained down. The tree seemed to be angry, spitting smoke and fire. Though Velu descended soon as cheerful as ever with the comb, containing several pounds of honey, the impression persisted with me that in that darkness above Velu had been tampering with the forces of evil.

One day Velu's wife came to the groves, slightly bent, with her dark eyes looking around as if she expected to see a snake or an iguana. "Gundu! Gundu!" she shouted. Gundu was hiding up a palm tree, of course.

She looked at us suspiciously, screwing up her small-boned face, framed with startlingly black hair done up into a smooth bun behind. "Little brothers, do you know where Gundu is?" she asked, looking harassed.

Before we could reply, Velu had come down from his tree. "What do you want with him?" He sounded like a mischievous schoolboy.

"I want him to go to the Junction Shop!" she shouted back. And then Gundu let loose a shower of nuts from his perch.

Her temper flared, and she screamed at Velu. "You and your trees! You spoil Gundu, and soon he will not be fit to lift a flea off a cow's tail! You and your trees! Oh, I wish I were dead!" She went back the way she had come. Gundu merely grinned. "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" Velu's stomach shook. He smiled at the boy lightheartedly and walked off to get on with his work. It seemed he conspired to keep Gundu in the palm groves with him, although there was very little for him to do.

"Why does she call the coconut trees evil?" I asked brother Rutnam.

"Who knows? They may be," he replied.

When we were in Velu's company it was difficult to think of anything but the trees' bounty and beneficence. It was his husbandry of thirty-six years that had made them grow. His love for them was infectious. For us, he filled the whole coconut world with wonder. "These are the best fighting trees," he said proudly, pointing them out. They were the trees that bore the nuts with extra thick shells for the coconut-splitting contests in which Velu took part.

During these games, the bowler of the opposing team threw a nut as hard as he could, while Velu hit it with the one in his hand. He was "out" if his coconut split or if he didn't split the other. In some villages, Velu told us, the holy water from split coconuts is collected in a pot and

then taken in procession through surrounding villages with cries of "Hoya!" The coconut water is wholesome and goodly and charms away disease. To hear Velu speak like this was to banish any suspicions I may have had that the coconut, like the neem and tamarind trees, was the haunt of devils.

Velu grieved whenever he had to destroy one of his trees. One day he pointed out to us an old tree that he thought was dangerous. "We will have to bring it down," he said unhappily. "I feel it's a mercy it was my grandfather and not I who planted it." Velu and Gundu then brought fiber ropes and tied the tree like a mast. Velu swung his ax above its base, and the sad old tree came crashing down. "It is a bad business," he said, and I thought so too. Then he cut out the enormous butter-colored cabbage in the tree's heart. It tasted delicious, like a cross between almonds and lettuce, and the surplus was pickled away. It had taken nearly a hundred years before we could have it, but it was well worth the waiting. Then Velu trimmed the trunk for a new well sweep.

"Do you know the coconut won't grow away from the sound of human voices or the sea?" Velu asked us. It is something all Ceylon villagers believe, so we raised our voices as we went through the groves, and the trees listened.

We had fine days at Atchuvely on that vacation. The sun was kindly, and we felt exhilarated by it. It was the gentle kind of sunlight which transforms everything it lies on into something young and glowing. Then one evening near the end of the holidays, before the break of the northeast monsoon, the clouds shut off the sun. It got dark and ominous in the mango and palm groves, and the cyclone struck us.

When a cyclone strikes, dust and the parched mango leaves rise from the ground in whirling eddies, and the forest groans. The coconut trunks bend like Rama's bow under the furious onslaught, their leaves chattering

and hissing excitedly. Above the storm, we hear the thud of nuts dropping to the ground. Suddenly the heavens open and the torrent falls in solid sheets with frightening violence. The water screeches down the guttters and pipes, drowning conversation. The devils in the tamarind and the other evil trees are on the prowl. The fish are lifted out of the sea by the waterspouts to fall from out of the sky onto our courtyards.

When all this fury and clamor ceased, Gundu arrived at the house carrying a hurricane lamp that had gone out. He was crying. "Father is hurt," he sobbed. Grabbing our hats and raincoats, we hurried on through the flood with Great-Grandfather and Grandfather-with-the-Beard. The night was black, and we pointed our flashlights directly on the path before us so as not to stumble on the brambles and coral rocks.

When we got to Velu's cottage, we saw a dreadful sight. By the light of hurricane lamps and flares of bundled-up dry coconut leaves, we saw that his cottage had been crushed flat to the ground like an eggshell. On top lay a fierce, menacing shape, wet and glistening, its long trunk snaking away from the wreck. It was one of Velu's three special trees, the ones that bore nuts with coral pink insides--the tallest and the one he loved best. During the storm's fury it had come down. Now it looked triumphant, its blown leaves hissing with malice. Velu had been trapped by a heavy beam and his neighbors were busy extricating him. They were silent and downcast. As they put Velu onto a stretcher, I dared not go near. His wife and daughter stood sobbing beside his farmer son, and little Gundu talked wildly to his father as they carried him to a car.

Velu recognized us by the light of the flares and smiled. "It was the tree," he said wearily, "but don't worry. I will be back soon to look after the groves."

"Yes, Velu," said Great-Grandfather, who was visibly moved. He had known Velu since he was a child.

My brothers and I visited him the next day at Manipay Hospital, ten miles away, which was staffed with American and Ceylonese doctors. Great-Grandfather accompanied us. The place was cool and spotless with white beds, and nurses in white saris. Velu was unconscious. Before the next morning's sun rose we heard he was dead, and we returned to Atchuvely with his body.

The drummers drummed that day and the funeral horns blew as the women of Atchuvely mourned ceremoniously for Velu. Some stood in paralled lines and others sat in circles. Each one made up a couplet in verse about the dead man's virtues and the incidents in his life they remembered with affection. They chanted them in turn and wailed together for a refrain. Someone cursed the coconut tree. The chanting went on all day. My brothers and I stole into the hastily erected thatch pavilion under which Velu lay to have our last look at him. He looked peaceful on the white bier surrounded by white jasmines and oleanders. Tall eight-wicked coconut-oil lamps of brass stood at his head and his feet.

We attended his cremation at sunset. His elder son walked three times round the pyre, carrying an earthenware pot of water on his shoulder and sprinkling the water on the ground. Then he dashed it on the pyre. It burst, spewing water about like a "fighting coconut." He set fire to the four corners of the pyre, the men doused it with coconut oil, and it blazed.

On that day I decided the coconut was an evil tree, although it is very difficult for anyone to say with certainty which trees are good and which are evil.

"What do you think?" I asked brother Rutnam.

"I don't know," he said. "But the coconut tree is very useful."

"Yes," I said, "until it kills you."

At Atchuvely today it is Gundu who tends our groves. He is youthful and tall and golden, and he wears his headcloth at a gay angle. When he is up in the trees with the breeze ripping through [redacted] and the nuts dropping around him, we almost imagine it is Velu. He has the same ready smile and confident air.

#

1. The Welt

November 26 1952. Another wilful movement, thrust of an amoeba's false foot in the dark. Shot in the dark of sardine-thick days in the fierce wake...to Ceylon, Malaya, India and Europe. The day watery, grey, babbling, shot through with buoys of harbour sounds. The briny, horsey loudspeakers: "All passengers report with passports in the first class lounge..." The bristling sergeant-major tugs, clipped and imperious, a swath of moustache under their pug noses. I have chosen this commitment, but the many who descended through this maw of the Narrows into the belly of New York Bay must surely have felt the same sense of helpless engulfment: detritus, scabs; ambition, want, bile; shiny kneecaps, shined shoes, gravied sweaters; thin cotton off-season dresses thrust limply moving between Brooklyn and New Jersey. This has happened before. Surely it has happened before? Journey to a new graveyard, maybe, and the wind slaps heedlessly past. The sun deck is immense. Like nowhere. The smokestacks, enormous ballrooms of frenzied figures, larger than New York. This is not a familiar ship to me. It was meant to be like America and, therefore, not like any other ship I have known.

"You must come to California," the sauterne blonde, hair shimmering in the half light, tells us. I have watched her throughout the voyage, not only because she is attractive. She is compelling, symbolic of newly fallen snow, apple trees and the mountains which once drew me like a magnet in new and exciting Europe. Communicative, even rough, she cuts neatly through attitudes and customs, once respected, which have now joined the worn-out and dusty things in a forgotten cupboard. Her language seems fresh compared to Britain's - urgent, earnest, with none of the meaning cleverly held back in deep-seated snobism, stage acting and doublethink. She seems <u>attached</u> to whatever she says.

Embassy in Ceylon and the difficulty of getting foreign exhcange from my own government (finally solved by the Prime Minister himself, Sir John Kotelawala - "You are a writer, we must keep you going,") our journey had become a chimaera of monstrous proportions and this ship, impersonal, clinical, and thundering with power, was bearing us straight into the storm's eye.

In the vastness of the Queen Elizabeth, with its grand stair-cases, saloons and dining rooms, the travellers barely talked to each other. It seemed as if the cathedral-like immensity had sil enced them. Perhaps the journey was too brief to put our private thoughts away in trunks and briefcases: to relax, unfreeze, get involved with our new surroundings. Through the courtesy of the Chief Steward, my wife and myself had been given a table to ourselves in the dining room, next to a porthole, our cabin was laden to the brim every day by the Cunard Line with flowers, fruit, roast-beef sandwiches, ice cream. And one day we were summoned to the chief-steward's blond-paneled many-roomed apartment on the high seas: an amazing phenomenon, since I was used to the smaller ships that must navigate the Suez. He was perfunctorily charming and pleasant, foretaste of things to come. The chief steward of our England bound ship, "Cookie" or Cookson, had written to Mr. Charlton about us. There was a dock strike in New York, he said. He would see to it that our luggage was safely delivered frmm our cabins to the customs. The introduction from "Cookie", of the P & O Chaloja who knew our stevedoring friend in Colombo, had come in useful.

Bustle of debarkation. Anxious eyes fixed on the immigration officer seated at a table. People led away to be questioned further by another officer. I am astonished that, unlike in other countries, American citizens are favored over visitors and tourists. Surely it is the foreigner to these shores who would need the swaddlings of courtesty. No. We are asked to queue. Americans first, immigrants second, possibly to be followed by the black sheep, the visitors, which included us. ~~Xxxxxxxx~~ Why not an ordinary democratic queue? The event adds fur-

ther to my apprehension. We have a thousand dollars to make a fresh deal with life or back to India like homing elvers, swimming! The voyage has already nibbled away at this morsel, although Laurence, who had originally air-mailed us a month at the grandiose and ugly Dorchester/Hôtel for a wedding present, when we next came to London, had whimsically showered a hundred pounds in our direction: some of my old friends caught in the post-war doldrums, were bankrupt, and I had some ready cash - to have an essential bit of equipment for a man's work transported, to invest in the daily buying and selling of antique china with an experienced eye (ex-Sandhurst, ex-Indian Army) to prolong the troubled, stop-gap day to day existence. Bearish Laurence with a mop of unruly electric, brown hair and gnome-like Cantabrigian humor had an elephant's memory. When the P and O Maloja rounded the Bay of Biscay we had received a cable from him, "Welcome to British Waters." Would the immigration officers make any trouble for us? Did they only tolerate Orientals in the U.S. because they were wealthy or titled? It's a shame that the well-intentioned Fulbright and Rockefeller grants in my experience, in Ceylon and India, have been granted to some of the wealthiest people I know who could have affordéd a hundred well-heeled trips to the U.S., creating a sense of resentment in the countries they tried to influence. They knew the Americans and the exchange banks best. They scarcely needed the opportunity or the grant. The best Ceylonese writer, J. Vija-Tunga, eking out a living in India. Our foremost painters, George Keyt or Manjusri, who cannot afford foreign travel, by-passed in favor of the daubing, scratching, roller-coasting son of a financial panjandrum. "You should wear aturban, especially if you go South," my friend Argus Tresidder, who is Public Affairs officer at the American Embassy, told me. I hope Denise Levertov and her writer husband Mitchell Goodman, whom I have yet to meet will be at the jetty to ease us through the customs. "You know, the New York Customs is very difficult. I hope you pass." My mind had fulminated convulsively for the past few months. I have written for a cheap apartment to Max Pfeffer (literary agent),

Conrad Aiken (poet), James Laughlin (publisher), Kilton Stewart (psychiatrist), Frances Steloff (bookseller), Buffie Johnson Sykes (painter), Ruthven Todd (friend). Refuge in numbers. "Do you know how much a cup of coffee costs at the Walforf?" Argus had asked me in Ceylong "You'll find out." I watch the immigration officials anxiously. The wonderful four days where the friends of my eleven years residence in London conjured five differently and widely flavoured parties, like London curries in mid-winter, to summon the abandon of an age that was past. "Why are you leaving?" "What will happen to you in America?" The noonday gathering at my favorite pub, The Hog in the Pound, at the corner of Oxford and New Bond Streets the night after our landing. So many old friends herded to the old stamping grounds by Tony Dickins, my oldest friend in England. The dignified one in Chelsea crammed with poets, artists and critics, presided by Kathleen Raine. Tony's, in his great basement in Kensington - snow-bound, warm fire, poems written for the occasion, the eel-like dancing of Australian painter Donald Friend transporting me back fourteen years to my first apartment in England. Visit to my godson, Christopher Irvin, son of John and Helen who worked with me for several years. Tea with T.S. Eliot in his eyrie of an office in Russell Square. "Eat at least one square meal a day. You will find the streets of New York like canyons poisoned by the exhausts of automobiles and you mustn't just live on that!" Betty and Peter's. Betty, also, worked in my office. Biddy's. "Is your husband still writing librettos for X's operas?" "Not really. You know Queen Mary attended the first night of the The Rape of Lucrece and, you know, X is queer. She went backstage after the performance to congratulate him. 'I liked it very much, Mr. X. But, young man, why did you choose such a theme?' 'Well, maam, you know I am interested in such things,' X replied. Don't you think it is screamingly funny?" Henry Miller: "Can't you think of a better place to go?" Where else is there to go? My eleven years in London went up in smoke at the stroke of a pen and I tried to make it rise like the phoenix in India and Ceylon. "Become a bargee. You have to barge through in New York. You are either a howling success,

of a flop, and they will mob you one day, my dear, and forget you the next. Keep on the move, fellow, that is New York for you. Not at all like London, old boy!" The ants, red and black, are climbing in slow stinging wires up the baked anthill of my neck. Erupting in chancres like badly blistered paint. Parched hot throats inside, all of an incomprehensible totality, lacking the coolness of the embodying rain. Will Jay Laughlin give me a job? Through him I met Harvey Breit three days before I sailed from Bombay. He has commissioned an article on Indian poetry for the Indian number of the Atlantic Monthly. Thinking of a dollar fee as contrasted to the rupee, a recent obsessional preoccupation, I had hastily finished it on the Maloja and Helen Irwin in air-mailing a neat typescript to New York. Square-rigged for America and prepared to give my best. Such efficient organization and promptness!

T The tense queue has shortened like elastic and we are almost at the table. If the tension had increased all through, as it has in me, it would have snapped and Safia and I would have landed on the table in front of the startled immigration officials. Outwardly I am at ease, for I must not let Safia suspect how I really feel about this trip which has so far been quite an unsettling commotion and serendipity for her. She has never left the shadow of her family in Bombay. The elastic has snapped. Impelled from behind, I find myself on a heap on the table, trying to look as innocent as possible, and ready with suitable retorts if questioned. Because of American Embassy grilling for visitors or immigrants I bet every visitor and immigrant has felt as I do. I look at Safia who stands straight and dignified, her spine erect and shoulders squared as she always does in the face of an awkward confrontation. Our passports are on the table. The official flicks through the first few pages, stamps them loudly, hands them back looking at us closely. I rush towards the gangway, the sucking wake closing behind me with the bubbling of hot sealingwax, the final seal to a predicament which I will always bear, and remember, throughout

my days and nights xh in New York, like a scar or a welt. The immigrants will always remember the mark gratefully for the badge of citizenship; for the others who managed to stay on through various ddvices, professional and otherwise, as I did, it will become a nightmare. I have left England behind with the ship, although this Queen which was spawned by the very size and economic strength of America was not at all like the England I had known.

Turn On, Tune In ~~and Drop In~~
~~The House~~ of Books
and Drop In
in Gay Paris

Tambimuttu

"Why?" I asked him at the staple office. "I liked the sound of its name." But never had never seen the writhing & grotesque & primeval Joshua tree in gay Joshua Tree mountain which turns everybody on and is a trip in itself.

I turned on, tuned in and dropped out at Timothy Leary's ~~Millbrook in New York State~~ League for Spiritual Discovery (LSD), ~~and I~~ where, in all innocence, since I had just arrived from a Hindu ~~a~~ ashram in Monroe, N.Y., I was elected a vice-president, ~~[illegible] my real name~~ ~~among office holders~~ except for ~~Tim~~ Tim's fictitious among the office holders, ~~[illegible]~~ using his real name. Perhaps my name sounded fictitious. the only one. My driving force at the Millbrook Colony, on a vast Mellon Hitchcock estate ~~I never knew but some said it was 10 square miles~~ ~~estate~~, was to Hinduize the rites in the meditation house in Millbrook, and the wedding ceremonies Tim conducted climaxed, for me, in Tim & Rosemary's ~~own~~ wedding on the peak of psychedelic & unearthly Joshua Tree Mountain in California. (George Harrison at [illegible] tells me he is writing a song about Joshua Tree.)

Now, on holiday in Paris, while my old ~~London~~ publishing house in London under the guise of Lyrebird Books, is being revived by my friends, I am varying Timothy's slogan (Time chose him as one of the men of 1969 for minting it) and I am turning on, tuning in and dropping IN in a strange house made entirely of BOOKS, not Joshua trees — kitchen — alcoves, reading rooms, a spacious meditation room for writer in residence, ~~reading rooms~~, which has functioned for years & now taking concrete shape, a ~~projected~~ café, ~~rest~~ free rest-rooms for the night or weeks for stranded travellers. ~~A leopard can't change his spots~~ An elephant can not forget and used to ~~living~~ ganging along with a tribe all my life (closely ~~knit~~ knit Ceylon family, the Poetry London crowd of the 30's & 40's, the Hindu Ashram & Millbrook Colony in the U.S.A.) ~~The~~ ultra-modern, an avant-set-up. I find it ~~immensely~~ consciousness-~~[illegible]~~ expanding, space-age ~~satisfying~~. It is natural for me ~~for me~~ and ~~organically & spiritually satisfying for me~~ and I I dig it, deeply and roundly, as I have done all my life, as much as possible. ~~The~~

The flower children of today may have discovered ~~[illegible]~~ uninhibited cheap communities, the receptive & isolating caves on a Mediterranean Island, green acres in Mexico, the Palace in Nepal or a ~~Ceylon~~ settlement in Ceylon. I, too, have searched like them for the thread of my life, a continuity that only a ~~sa~~ ~~philosophical attitu~~de philosophy down to the bone & stone can give and, is in despair for the immediate present, I have arrived at this Hindu ashram of ~~the~~ a bookshop. The man I had come to see, Henry Miller was away for a few ~~I~~ was lost in Paris, so I phoned my old writer novelist friend Lawrence Durrell in M. in Sommieres in the South for some ~~direct~~ direction. "See George Whitman at Shakespeare Co." "He is a total environment, a [illegible]" was all he could tell me. (his real name) ~~stair~~ star-haired

I arrived at the shop with Chance Lord, an American friend from Millbrook. "That's him sitting there," Chance whispered. ~~as I was taking stock of a book-shelf~~. I turned around and saw a slightly built with a fey elfin very slightly built, narrow, fine-boned face, blue eyes, ~~[illegible]~~ Uncle Sam blond goatee. The collateral descendant of Walt Whitman.

Extending my hand "George Whitman?" I said.

Extending his "Tambimuttu?" George ~~said~~ retorted purring like a cat. Weirdly African ~~incident~~ echo ~~I thought~~ in the wilds of Paris, I thought.

"Would you care to stay in the shop?" he asked the handsome ~~Chance~~ G. Whitman straight off his ~~[illegible]~~ telegraphic cuff, his second ~~time~~ bis, ~~silence~~.

"I would," I said. "But I'm staying at the Hotel des Saints Peres." ~~Correcting~~ correcting myself regretfully, Chance ~~was~~ couldn't accept. He came he was staying ~~with~~ at his girl friend's parents' apartment ~~while they were holidaying~~.

George seemed well ~~withdrawn~~ ~~drawn in~~ in-drawn, deep into his delicate frame like those pink & white sea creatures in their shells with tiny bits of personality sticking out ~~as flash~~ ~~as stars~~ now and then in the few things he said ~~softly~~ softly, shyly, casually like flickering lights through ~~the~~ a "star-eaten blanket of the sky." "I don't know why, but I like waiting on other people," he told me ~~later~~ another day later he served me dinner at the sole ~~simple~~ iron ~~table~~, circular table, painted white, outside on the terrace of his shop, a garden table. ~~Brassaï~~ My old friend Brassaï of the Café Dome days in the thirties, the photographer and vieux ami of Picasso, was a surprise visitor, with his wife, to the table that evening.

In his garden house of books George Whitman's ~~pre~~occupation is the practice of Karma yoga – the yoga ~~of~~ of selfless service & work without regard for profit, one of the eight chief forms of yoga or eight paths to transcendent knowledge to preserve the balance of nature. It is also his karma or nature-equipped vocation & trying to upset it or wilfully change it would only cause distress & personal ~~un~~happiness as the western & American ~~scenes~~ scenes ~~[illegible]~~ blistered and volcanoed in headlines, shocks & disasters. & ~~Mr~~ Paul Zweig, poet & lecturer from Columbia University, Desert Islands & R. C. ~~Desert Adventures~~ I hadn't seen for fifteen years

"May I borrow this book George?" ~~handsome~~ intense like a sparrow Paul Zweig from New York asks. A copy of De... by the dark, ~~dapper~~ well-knit & George runs a free lending library to all callers – a community service like the various free services of the Diggers in New York who ran a free medical clinic & free shop to give away typewriters, carpets, record-players, the necessities of life. (They once transformed my N.Y. office into an oriental one within a few hours for a party I had for my late uncle, Sir Chinu[illegible] ~~[illegible]~~ friend: Hedi Lamarr. I ~~only~~ was a friend of her son ~~daughter-in-law~~ without knowledge of his mother's identity and he & his wife Roxy had asked me whether they could bring her to my weekly Friday party. I had immediately produced a photo of ~~my~~ Hedi & my uncle & decided ~~it~~ to create the environment of India & Ceylon. I phoned up the Diggers. They brought ~~the~~ material & did the work within 2 hours without any expense. Karma-yoga. The yoga of the flower-children. The young of today. George's yoga. My yoga). OMIT

"Of course, Paul," George said, "don't forget to

return it," ~~George said~~. I had not seen Paul, poet and lecturer
at Columbia University since I last saw him 15 years ~~ago~~ ~~back~~
ago in New York at the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village
– the favorite pub ~~of Dylan Thomas~~ & the British ~~[illegible]~~
and Dylan Thomas. turned into
the artists of the quarter. He had ~~[illegible]~~ a house in Perigord in
~~He~~ ~~He realized our friendship enthusiastically~~ south where he
had settled down and was engaged on a book on Adventure.
~~the~~ subject he had been ~~lecturing~~ teaching at Columbia. By
adventure he must mean awareness of and letting ourselves be relaxedly
part of the cosmic flux, to experience, knowledge, love – the
dance of ~~cosmic~~ energy, the atomic dance, the Dance of
Shiva the god with a 1001 ~~[illegible]~~er, in other words infinite
systole & diastole of
names. The dance of Kosmos: expanding, contracting, ~~the~~ the
human heart. When Shiva stops dancing the world sleeps for
aeons & when he wakes it dances again. The stars, flowers,
rocks,
~~stones~~ beings are aspects of his cosmic dance – the
discovery of Blake & the flower children in the Hindu
mandala – the point of meditation & expanding
energy in free play, inter-acting, creating, preserving,
the atom;
destroying, changing, the cosmic play of we are all
pure energy, free and beautiful, giving & taking.
~~I hear~~ ~~Speak~~ George introduces
~~Jim~~ Haynes, to
"~~Have~~ you met Tamburlaine," ~~George's telegraphese~~ ~~say~~
a tall, bearded powerfully-built young man in leather
jacket and leather satchel slung on his shoulder reminiscent of young
Ed Sanders, founder of the Fugs Pop group in America. ~~him~~ "Jim, I've quite [illegible]
~~rush to him~~ & put my arms round Jim Haynes
wanted to meet you. "I called on ~~you~~ twice your Arts Lab in London twice to
~~on New Year Eve~~ ~~Madeleine & Charles Ford~~
I missed ~~it~~ you. ~~Here~~, Hugh
M & C
gave me your address in Paris, ~~& I was going to phone~~

On New Year's Eve

~~but meeting you just, pulling out their card. They got married~~
~~you know & I've advised Charles to pull out of the mess~~
~~Establishment of academic & Country, Fakes & Fakery. No place for a young &~~
~~creative man with new ideas~~ full of the ~~most~~ realistic ~~[illegible]~~ ideas
~~of this century, or any century.~~"

"I've had to close the Arts Lab," Jim ~~says~~ says.

When the journey was resumed, Uncle Gamini lit a cigarette without permission. "Mr. Gamini, dear sir," protested the Magistrate, "you must not smoke. You must understand the Court is still sitting. It's a legal fiction, so to say, of course, but wherever the Magistrate goes, the Court goes." Uncle Gamini apologized suitably, and threw the cigarette out the window.

On the return journey, the carriage stopped at the fair to pick up the Magistrate's wife, whereupon Uncle Gamini gallantly volunteered to look for the lady. He jumped out of the carriage, wandered about the crowd for a while, and returning announced in his best Court manner: "Sir, the Court's wife wishes me to inform the Court that the Honourable Court's wife is busy buying vegetables."

Gentlemen, The Queen!

After years of monkeying at the bar, Uncle Gamini has become rich and is now Member of Parliament for Colombo South. He was, of course, one of the United National Party M.P.s who voted to keep Ceylon in the British Commonwealth. He is in the public eye, and contrives to remain there by sponsoring beauty competitions among village girls all over the island. Though this foreign institution is anathema to the people, it gets him into the English-language papers that are read in Colombo. Perhaps it is for this same reason that he has acquired, as have other public men such as Sir Bougainvillaea Weerasekera, Sir Tudor Tissera, and Sir Samarasekera Lunuwilla, a string of race horses. The Colombo Race Meet rivals Ascot, and surpasses it in the colorful saris, blouses, and sunshades that protect the ladies.

Uncle Gamini, in common with most of his friends, believes in English education. Most of them have been to England or the English-style University of Ceylon. The Varsity Rag in Ceylon far outdoes Cambridge or Oxford, both in virulence and brilliance. And Uncle Gamini never misses the Royal-Thomian or the Law-Medical cricket matches. Based on the Eton-Harrow matches, these events gain in accoutrements every year, whereas the Eton boys no longer wear their top hats.

SINCE THE DAWN of independence, Uncle Gamini's ties with the British have grown stronger than ever. His three sons are being educated in England, while his daughter copes with English thought at Cheltenham Ladies' College. He hopes she will be presented at Court next year.

He himself hopes to be knighted by Queen Elizabeth, towards which end he is engaged in many charitable and other works. In some of the commercial firms that he owns, the principals are Englishmen recently imported from England, and many of his friends are knights—Sir John Kotelawala, Sir Edward Nugewala, Sir Chittampalam Gardiner, Sir Claude Corea, Sir Donatus Victoria, and Sir Oliver Goonetilleke.

His name was not among those honored at New Year's, but we all hope that Uncle Gamini's fondest dream will be realized when the Queen's next birthday honors are published.

The Unpopular Passenger

A Short Story

ROBERT K. BINGHAM

SNOW was falling out of the dark into the tiny cones of light under street lamps down below as the plane circled to land at Cleveland. When the hostess saw that I was awake and that my safety belt was already fastened, she smiled efficiently and moved on down the aisle, waking the other passengers and asking them to fasten their safety belts. I did not make the effort to return her smile but turned again to look down on the miniature suburbs below.

The young soldier sitting next to me stretched awake and looked out the window too. "Must be a late party at that house," he said through a yawn. He pointed to where the lights were on in one half of a brick two-family house on a street of unlighted but otherwise identical brick two-family houses. Or somebody dying, was my first thought.

Being awake at three or four in the morning, sober and bored, waiting only for a certain time to elapse or a certain distance to be traveled, reminded me inevitably of my own days and nights as a soldier, of an emptiness in which at last even the too familiar prospect of death loses its power to provoke emotion.

After hovering uncertainly in the air, the plane settled clumsily on the ground, stumbled to a stop, and then waddled into the brightly lighted area around the terminal building, wheezing and gasping. "One hour and forty-five minutes late," declared a resonant bass voice several seats behind me. "I told them we'd be there at a decent hour, but at this rate we won't be there before dawn." Several other passengers glanced at their wrist watches.

Those of us who were getting off